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* Calculations based on average serving (6 oz glass of wine and single serving of mixed drink). Details at molsoncanadian67.ca

ADVERTORIAL

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WHEN PUSH COMES TO SHOVEL
KEEP YOUR HEART HEALTHY {page 31}

FEELIN' IT
WHY MUSIC MAKES US FEEL GOOD
{page 29}

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Husband of blinded student dies in custody

Hasan Syed believed to have died of cardiac arrest in Bangladesh hospital

A man accused of blinding his wife and biting her nose off during a savage attack is reported to have died in custody in Bangladesh.

Reports from the capital city Dhaka say Hasan Syed, who is alleged to have tried to gouge out the eyes of Rumana Manzur, was being treated for mental illness at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, where he apparently died from cardiac arrest.

Manzur, 33, a Fulbright scholar completing a master's degree at the University of British Columbia, had returned this past spring to visit her five-year-old daughter and husband when she was brutally attacked and left blinded.

MATT KIELTYKA/METRO FILE

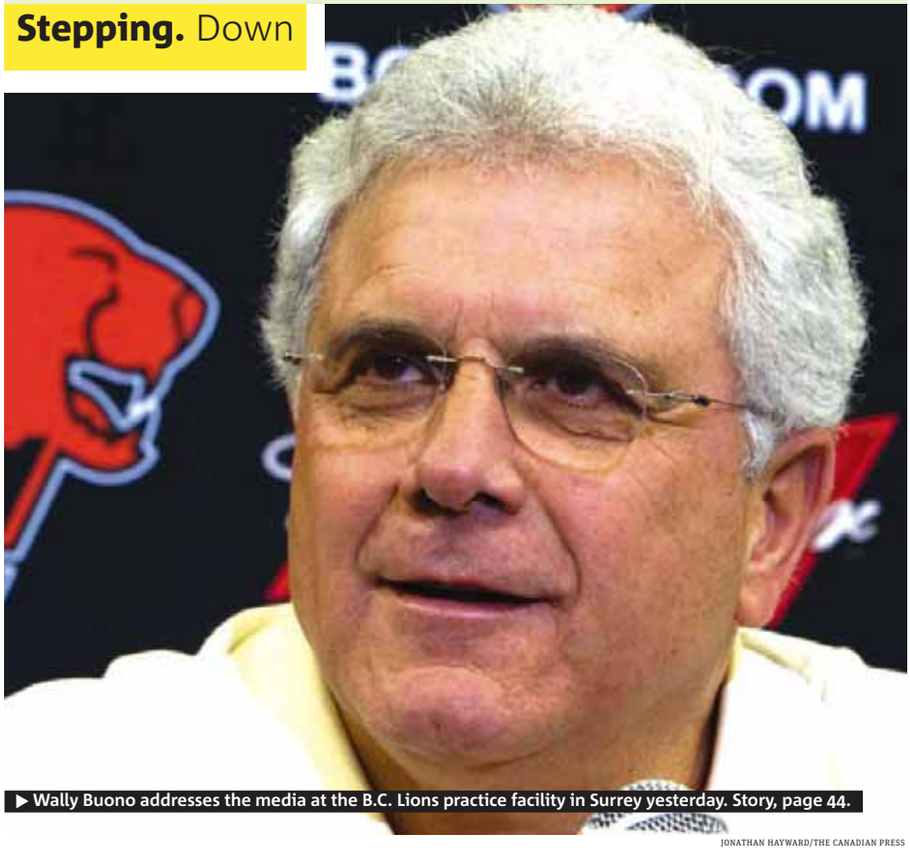
▶ Rumana Manzur

Manzur's aunt, who did not want her name used, said yesterday that the family is aware of Syed's death but that her niece was unable to talk about it.

"We cannot comment. Right now, this is still very upsetting and the family won't talk about it," she said.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Stepping. Down



▶ Wally Buono addresses the media at the B.C. Lions practice facility in Surrey yesterday. Story, page 44.

JONATHAN HAYWARD/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Buono leaving the playing field

Buono announced that he is stepping down as head coach of the B.C. Lions but will stay on as the team's general manager.

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Smartphone theft on the rise in Richmond: RCMP

Stolen smartphones account for more than a third of all robberies in Richmond, according to the RCMP. Richmond RCMP said 44 of 127 personal robberies so far this year have been cellphone-related.

"Cellphone theft has been more prevalent. It's been happening more often," said Cpl. Sherrdean Turley.

Since late July, Richmond RCMP has seen a sharp increase in thefts of cellular phones. Several of those incidents stemmed from a man targeting people selling smartphones on Craigslist, but police have made an arrest in that case.

DANIEL PALMER

Tool allows earlier surgery for patients

Fraser Health launched an online tool yesterday that allows patients to choose surgeons who are able to perform surgeries sooner. The Soonest Surgery Tool allows patients to choose a surgical procedure from a drop-down list and the website will generate a list of five surgeons able to perform the surgery the soonest. Patients can choose from a list of 250 surgeons from 10 hospitals.

KENDRA WONG

One of B.C.'s most wanted arrested in smartphone scam

Man impersonated delivery driver to steal smartphones ◗ Zhang faces 46 criminal charges related to theft and driving infractions

DANIEL PALMER
VANCOUVER@METRONEWS.CA

A Vancouver man convicted in the 2006 hit-and-run death of a New Zealand doctor is once again behind bars.

Xiao (Sean) Zhang was arrested Nov. 18 on 33 criminal charges including theft, fraud and driving while prohibited in relation to a smartphone scam.

Police said a man impersonating a courier convinced people their recently purchased smartphones had been delivered in error. The unsuspecting victims would give their phones to the man and would only realize they had been duped after they contacted their cellular providers.

Richmond RCMP has also recommended charges against Zhang for allegedly targeting people selling their smartphones on Craigslist.

In eight incidents, a man convinced the seller to meet and hand over the phone.

Once the phone was in the man's possession, he fled the scene without paying.

VPD and Richmond RCMP began working together once they recognized the pattern of theft, and isolated Zhang through surveillance operations.

DANIEL PALMER/FOR METRO

▶ VPD Const. Lindsey Houghton addresses the media yesterday. Police recently arrested a man wanted for dozens of cellphone thefts across the Lower Mainland.

▶ Xiao Sean Zhang

Zhang will appear in court Dec. 14 on 13 charges unrelated to his latest arrest.

VPD Const. Lindsey Houghton said it is unlikely Zhang will be released on bail as he now faces a total of 46 charges.

"He has been prone to flee in the past," said Houghton.

Houghton said Zhang was able to evade police in part because he went by several aliases.

"It's difficult when people are crafty and wily to figure out just who they are," Houghton said, adding that in March Zhang topped the list of most-wanted alleged car thieves,

Zhang served five months of an 11-month sentence for running over and killing David Higgins in 2006 as Higgins crossed Granville Street with his daughter.

For more local news, visit metronews.ca/vancouver

1 news

A pharmaceutical company says its new sleep drug will keep you dozing but that you might also drive or make phone calls while under the drug's influence. Scan the code for the story.

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On the web at metronews.ca

A dismal week on the markets was followed by a banner week. Allan Small has some theories as to what's behind the volatility. More at metronews.ca/investing

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Early-prevention key to reducing domestic violence: Report

When a restaurant owner named Peter Lee murdered his wife, young son and parents before killing himself near Victoria in 2007, British Columbia's solicitor general promised to fight domestic violence.

The BC Coroners Service held an inquest, the province spent $250,000 on risk-assessment training and the government convened a panel to examine 29 deaths and make recommendations.

But the attention was short-lived. Instead, B.C. has become a province that's falling behind in targeting domestic violence and typically only takes action after high-profile cases, a new report concludes.

The report was released yesterday by researchers at Simon Fraser University, who reviewed the incidence of domestic violence in the province. It calls on the B.C. government to develop a comprehensive plan to protect women and children.

"While there's been a lot of things done recently in response to some very high-profile deaths, all of us are calling for a longer-term strategy that's not just reactive," said Tracy Porteous, executive director with the Ending Violence Association of B.C.

75%

Some 73 people murdered between January 2003 and August 2008 were killed in domestic disputes, with 75 per cent of the victims being women.

Porteous has spent 30 years working in the anti-violence sector and assisted in compiling the report, which was led by Simon Fraser University's FREDA Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children.

Family violence ranges from abuse or assault between intimate partners to child and elder abuse.

The rate of family-related homicides in B.C. is slightly above the Canadian average, and below only the Prairie provinces and territories, according to the report.

Some 73 people murdered between January 2003 and August 2008 were killed in domestic disputes, with 75 per cent of the victims being women. There were 605 homicides overall during the same period.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Robertson talks affordable housing

- Ending street homelessness by 2015 still top priority: Mayor
- New task force to reduce barriers to home ownership and rentals

PHYLICIA TORREVILLAS
VANCOUVER@METRONEWS.CA

Mayor Gregor Robertson promised more affordable housing and recommitted to ending street homelessness by 2015 at his inauguration ceremony yesterday.

In his inaugural speech, Robertson announced he will be striking a task force that will look into ways of increasing Vancouver's supply of affordable housing.

"Can city hall solve our affordability crisis by itself, in three years? No," Robertson said. "But we're not powerless. And over the next term this council will take action."

He said he will be seeking expertise from architects, developers, building owners and financiers to weigh in and help the city to take the next steps.

"We want to focus on solutions the city can lead to create more affordable housing, what we can do with the city's asset base, zoning and regulation to make sure we get more affordable housing built in the short term," said Robertson, who wore a ceremonial kilt as he did at his 2008 inauguration.

Robertson also promised to keep taxes low, support small businesses, secure at least 500 new child-care spaces, as well as invest in the city's creative economy by protecting artist spaces and creating new studio space for cultural entrepreneurs.

A dozen protesters outside the community centre banged on windows and shouted, "We're hungry too."

"It was particularly inappropriate during the First Nations prayers, which led off this event," Robertson told reporters after the ceremony.

"That's unfortunate and not very respectful."

The mayor and new council held their first meeting yesterday afternoon.

PHYLICIA TORREVILLAS/METRO

▶ Mayor Gregor Robertson and the newly elected and returning city councillors celebrate yesterday after the inauguration ceremony at Creekside Community Centre.

"Can city hall solve our affordability crisis by itself, in three years? No ... but we're not powerless. And over the next term this council will take action."

MAYOR GREGOR ROBERTSON

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Trying to keep the green dream alive

- Canada has announced it will not renew Kyoto Protocol commitment
- David Suzuki Foundation says it's up to local government to lead the way

MATT KIELTYKA
@METRONEWS.CA

ARIANA KAKNEVICIUS/METRO FILE

▶ Vancouver is striving to become the greenest city in the world.

Green-conscious cities like Vancouver risk having their hard work ruined with the federal government deciding not to re-commit to the Kyoto Protocol yesterday.

Vancouver has been able to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 11 per cent since 2000, even though its population grew by 27 per cent and economy by 18 per cent.

But as commendable as that accomplishment is, Ian Bruce, a climate- change and clean-energy specialist at the David Suzuki Foundation, says Canada's decision not to set new reduction targets endangers the progress being made on a local level.

"The environment has no borders," said Bruce. "The silver lining is that local and provincial government are stepping up and showing leadership. But the efforts of provinces like Quebec, B.C. and Ontario can be undone if there are no target across Canada as a whole."

Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson said the decision signifies a shift in responsibility.

"What's clear is that a lot of the change we need to make with the environment and climate has to be led with cities now," he said. "We're not seeing that leadership at national levels. We need the cities to drive the pace."

Greenpeace climate and energy campaigner Keith Stewart believes the green economy, a focus of Vancouver city council, in Canada could take a major hit with the government's announcement.

"Canada will be left behind in the race to become green-energy leaders," Stewart said. "It really is a short-sighted policy.... It will cost us internationally."

Provincially, British Columbia is still committed to meeting its legislated goal of reducing emissions by 33 per cent by 2020.

More on Kyoto {page 14}

CRIME

Teen pleads guilty over rape pics

A teenage boy who was charged with snapping photos during the alleged rape of a 16-year-old girl near Vancouver has pleaded guilty.

The youth, who can't be named, was charged with making and distributing child pornography after what the RCMP described as a gang rape in Pitt Meadows in September 2010.

Crown spokesman Neil MacKenzie says the teen has pleaded guilty to making and distributing obscene material, rather than the child-pornography charges, and will be sentenced in the new year.

Mounties have said the girl was drugged and repeatedly raped during a rave on a rural property in Pitt Meadows, where onlookers snapped photos and later posted them to Facebook.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Alleged thief runs out of rubber

Two police agencies and the coast guard were involved in an early-morning chase through Richmond and Vancouver yesterday.

Richmond RCMP say they first heard of a truck being stolen from the 8000 block of Colonial Drive at 4:20 a.m. and patrol officers began looking out for the vehicle.

About an hour later, Mounties spotted the truck heading towards the Dinsmore Bridge and set up a spike belt in the hopes of stopping the driver.

But even with the stolen truck's tires being blown out, police say the driver managed to make it into Vancouver on steel rims before dumping the truck near Marine Drive and Cambie Street and fleeing on foot.

Vancouver police launched a search for the suspect, and a dog eventually tracked him to the Fraser River.

The 34-year-old suspect had jumped into the river and was hiding behind a retaining wall, so the coast guard's hovercraft was dispatched to take him into custody.

MATT KIELTYKA

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LABOUR SKILLS

$10M for 3-year training program

The B.C. government is offering $10 million for job-training projects over the next three years.

Jobs Minister Pat Bell says business and industrial groups facing labour shortages can apply for funding under the program

Up to $500,000 is available for each training project that's approved.

The program is aimed at preparing the unemployed.

It can also assist those with few skills for jobs in a range of occupations, from retail to industrial.

That includes training for shipbuilding work after the North Vancouver firm Seaspan won an $8-billion federal shipbuilding contract last month.

The programs could also help train heavy-equipment operators and drivers for the mining industry.

Bell says it's important for the government to provide the tools that various business sectors can use to train the right people for the right jobs.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Lake Babine Nation demands an apology for pipeline

The Lake Babine Nation wants an apology from the Gitxsan Treaty Office for signing an agreement with Enbridge on the Northern Gateway Pipeline.

Chief Wilf Adam says the proposed pipeline won't cross Gitxsan territory in northwestern B.C. but other aboriginal bands including the Babine may be affected if there are problems transporting tarsands oil through the area.

Adam says the Gitxsan infringed on the rights and title of its neighbours by supporting Enbridge.

On Friday, a Gitxsan spokesman announced the band had accepted Enbridge's offer of an equity stake in the project and will receive at least $7 million in profit.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Raising a totem in honour of justice

A tribute to local activist Liz Elliott, new totem pole was carved by inmates at the Ferndale Correctional Institution, where she volunteered

KENDRA WONG
VANCOUVER@METRONEWS.CA

SFU criminologist Liz Elliott, who passed away three months ago, was honoured at the university yesterday with the raising of a totem pole carved by inmates at the Ferndale Correctional Institution.

Family, friends, students and colleagues gathered in a heartfelt memorial for the 54-year-old criminologist and former co-director of SFU's Centre for Restorative Justice. She passed away from cancer in September.

Elliott was a champion of restorative justice and was known for her activism and outreach.

It was an inmate at the Ferndale Correctional Institution in Mission, where Elliott volunteered, who commissioned the idea of carving a totem pole to represent the associate professor's love for First Nations culture.

"We just wanted to do something to give back to her because she has helped so many people in such an immense way," said the man, who wanted to remain anonymous and who had known Elliott for 10 years.

"Her goal was to build a better place, and (she) made me feel like I could make changes in myself, that I could be a part of something that I never saw myself being a part of," said the man, who designed and carved the 2.6-metre totem pole from a fallen red cedar tree from Stanley Park. It now stands outside the school of criminology at SFU.

The university has also established a memorial scholarship in Elliot's name for graduate students interested in correctional reform and restorative justice.

KENDRA WONG/FOR METRO

The totem pole receives a blessing from First Nations elders before being raised at SFU yesterday.

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Trial date set in RCMP Taser case

Dziekanski died after he was Tasered at YVR in October 2007 Officers testified they feared for their safety and the safety of other passengers

The RCMP officers who confronted Robert Dziekanski at Vancouver's airport the night the Polish man died are scheduled to stand trial on perjury charges late next year and 2013.

Dziekanski died after he was stunned multiple times with a Taser in October 2007, prompting a high-profile public inquiry in which the officers took the stand to defend their actions.

The Mounties weren't charged for the fatal confrontation, but a special prosecutor announced perjury charges earlier this year in connection with the officers' testimony at the inquiry.

Const. Bill Bentley, Const. Kwesi Millington, Const. Gerry Rundell and Cpl. Benjamin Robinson were each charged with perjury, although they were charged under separate indictments and aren't expected to stand trial together.

Court records indicate jury selection for Bentley's case is set for Oct. 4, 2012, with a trial scheduled to begin four days later.

Robinson's trial is scheduled for April 2013, while Millington's trial is set for October 2013.

A date for Rundell's trial hasn't been set, but that could happen at a court appearance next week.

Lawyers for the officers have said they will vigorously defend themselves against the perjury accusations.

Picked up stapler

- The officers each testified that Dziekanski became a threat when he picked up a stapler, and they insisted they feared for their safety and the safety of other passengers at the airport.

The four officers were called to Vancouver airport after several 911 calls about a man throwing furniture in the international terminal.

Dziekanski, who didn't speak English, had been at the airport for about 10 hours, lost and unable to find his mother.

Amateur video shows the officers surrounding Dziekanski, who by then had stopped throwing furniture. Within seconds of arriving, Millington stunned Dziekanski with a Taser several times.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

SAM SMITH/METRO FILE

▶ Video cameras capture Cpl. Benjamin Robinson's testimony in March 2009 during the public inquiry into the death of Polish immigrant Robert Dziekanski.

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Predator species in Pacific declining: Study

ERIC RISBERG/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

▶ California sea lions shown at Seal Cove at the Farallones National Wildlife Refuge last month. This chain of small rock islands near San Francisco is known as California's Gallapagos.

A new study published by University of British Columbia scientists says overfishing is taking a heavy toll on marine predators such as sharks, tuna and swordfish.

The study, published online yesterday in the journal Marine Ecology Progress Series, says predator species in north-Pacific waters have dropped by more than 90 per cent since the 1950s.

Lead author Laura Tremblay-Boyer says predator species are also experiencing a dramatic decline in the south seas as those species are caught and sent to northern markets for consumption.

Tremblay-Boyer says the declines could create some fundamental changes for the marine ecosystem, noting that species such as tuna have been exploited because of high demand.

Co-author Daniel Pauly says that once the predator fish are gone from the southern hemisphere people living there will not be able to look north to satisfy their own fish needs.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Student arrested in bomb threat

A male student has been arrested in connection with two threats made to Sentinel Secondary School in late November.

The West Vancouver Police Department responded to two separate phone threats on Nov. 25 and 29. In both cases, students and staff were ushered out of the building.

Police have determined the threats were unfounded but continue to actively investigate the incident.

The student was released from police custody on a Promise to Appear in Court.

KENDRA WONG

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News in brief

2011's word of the year is ...

CAN YOU USE IT IN A SENTENCE? You may not have heard the word before now but according to Dictionary.com, tergiversate (TUR-ji-ver-seyt) is the word of the year. Tergiversate means "to change repeatedly one's attitude or opinions with respect to a cause or subject." **THE CANADIAN PRESS**

Bottle braves the Atlantic

GLASS PASSAGE. A 10-year-old upstate New York boy's message in a bottle dropped in the Atlantic as part of a school project has been retrieved across the ocean in the Azores.

Curtis Kipple of Adams Basin, west of Rochester, wrote a letter in March along with his fellow fourth graders. The bottles were dropped into the Gulf Stream, 30 miles off shore, by a fisherman from North Carolina's Outer Banks.

The Democrat and Chronicle of Rochester reports that the school received a return email this week from a tiny fishing village on the Azores archipelago off Portugal. **THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**

Search upsets senior citizen

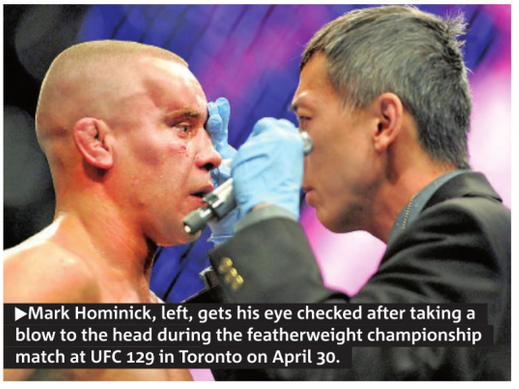
TROUSER DOWNER. A second senior citizen is claiming the Transportation Security Administration made her pull down her pants during a search at New York's Kennedy Airport.

Eighty-eight-year-old Ruth Sherman of Sunrise, Florida, tells WCBS television in New York that agents were suspicious of her colostomy bag. **THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**

Fists up over UFC event

Toronto city councillor says anti-bullying rally fronted by mixed martial artists will send 'a good message'

NATHAN DENETTE/THE CANADIAN PRESS



▶Mark Hominick, left, gets his eye checked after taking a blow to the head during the featherweight championship match at UFC 129 in Toronto on April 30.

The mixed martial-arts fighters of the popular UFC are the ideal ambassadors to deliver anti-bullying messages to the youth of Toronto, a controversial city councillor said yesterday.

Doug Ford, brother to the city's firebrand mayor Rob, defended his support yesterday of an anti-bullying event sponsored by the city's police service and the Ultimate Fighting Championship, the world's largest mixed martial arts promoter.

A weekend report in the Toronto Star newspaper suggested the rookie councillor was pushing for an ongoing partnership between the city's school boards and the UFC.

The report angered some school trustees, who considered Ford's endorsement irresponsible at a time when teen suicides were grabbing headlines and anti-bullying initiatives were under discussion in at least two provincial legislatures.

Ford, however, insisted yesterday that he did nothing more than offer a one-time endorsement for a one-off event.

"A lot of these kids, their idols are athletes, be it in football, or a hockey athlete, or a UFC athlete," Ford said in a telephone interview. "If we can get the message through some of their idols, I think it's a good message."

The public event today at Toronto's Rogers Centre will feature speeches from four UFC stars. **THE CANADIAN PRESS**

Ultimate facts

History of violence.

- A combat sport that debuted in 1993 with virtually no rules other than no biting or eye-gouging, mixed martial arts now has a unified set of rules and is sanctioned in most jurisdictions by the same athletic bodies that govern boxing.
- UFC fighters train in a variety of styles, from boxing and wrestling to jiu-jitsu and wrestling

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U.S. rethinks visa plan

Secretary of State orders review of popular exchange program after officials find workers were exploited by mafia, businesses Reforms being considered

J-1 controversy

- **The State Department has** made several changes last year after it uncovered widespread abuses, including living and working conditions that some participants compared to indentured servitude.
- **In one of the worst cases,** a woman said she was beaten, raped and forced to work as a stripper in Detroit after being promised a job as a waitress in Virginia.
- **In August, dozens of** workers protested conditions at a candy factory that packs Hershey chocolates in Pennsylvania, complaining of hard physical labour and pay deductions for rent that often left them with little money.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has ordered an "extensive and thorough review" of a foreign-exchange program that has been used by U.S. businesses as a source of cheap labour and exploited by criminals to import women to work in the sex industry.

In the latest debacle for the J-1 Summer Work Travel visa, a federal indictment unsealed last week accuses the mafia of using the cultural exchange program to bring Eastern European women to work in New York strip clubs.

The U.S. House Judiciary Committee's immigration subcommittee also has been gathering information on the J-1 visa, which was created in 1963 to allow college students from other countries to spend their summer breaks living, working and travelling in the U.S.

As the program has grown to facilitate more than 100,000 exchanges annually, it has become as much about money as cultural understanding.

A State Department spokesman, who spoke anonymously, said Clinton "has called for an extensive and thorough review of the program."

"We continue to be committed to working to strengthen the Summer Work Travel Program to safeguard the health and welfare of the participants," the official said in an email late Friday. "We have already instituted one set of reforms and are working toward additional ones that take additional measures to protect participants and prioritize the original cultural intent of the program."

The New York case was made public just days after the State Department opened a period of public comment on proposed changes that would require companies that sponsor the participants to gather more information about employment and living arrangements.

The reforms being considered by the State Department would limit and refine the types of jobs students can have, expand the list of prohibited employment categories and strengthen the cultural aspects of the program.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Russia. Protest

▶ Police officers detain an opposition activist during a protest against vote rigging in St. Petersburg, Russia, yesterday.

DMITRY LOVETSKY/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Election outrages Russians

Thousands of protesters hit the streets last night and accused Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's party of rigging this weekend's parliamentary election in which it won the largest share of the seats, but its popularity fell.

Gender segregation not required, rabbi says

One of Israel's chief rabbis ventured into the divisive question of gender segregation yesterday, saying separate seating for men and women on buses and similar practices adopted by some devout Jews are not required by Jewish law.

Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar spoke after U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton was quoted by Israeli media as expressing shock over the segregated buses and other practices of radicalized religious activists.

In an interview with the ultra-Orthodox Kol Brama radio station, Amar was critical of these relatively new and controversial practices.

"People who do it do it for their own sakes," he said of the segregated buses. "Certain people want to delineate a fence, perhaps because they saw a need for it. But it's not Jewish law."

Radical activists have segregated buses, cowed advertisers into removing images of women from posters on the streets of cities with large ultra-Orthodox Jewish populations, shunted women onto separate sidewalks and walked out of military events where women have sung.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Japan plant leaks toxic water

Japan's crippled nuclear power plant leaked about 45 tons of highly radioactive water from a purification device over the weekend, its operator said, and some may have drained into the ocean.

The leak is a reminder of the difficulties facing Tokyo Electric Power Co. as it tries to meet its goal of bringing the tsunami-damaged Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant to a cold shutdown by year's end.

A pool of radioactive water was discovered midday Sunday around a decontamination device, TEPCO said in a statement on its website. After the equipment was turned off, the leak appeared to stop. Later, workers found a crack in a concrete barrier leaking the contaminated water into a gutter that leads to the ocean.

TEPCO estimated about 300 litres leaked out before the crack was blocked with sandbags.

The leakage of radioactive water from the Fukushima plant into the Pacific Ocean in the weeks after the March 11 accident caused widespread concern that seafood in the coastal waters would be contaminated.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TOKYO ELECTRIC POWER CO./THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

▶ This photo released on Sunday by Tokyo Electric Power Co. shows leakage from a purification device at the tsunami-damaged Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant.

Anti-conflict-diamond body failing: Rights group

A major human-rights watchdog has left the international body charged with keeping blood diamonds off the market, accusing the group of refusing to address links between the gems, violence and tyranny. Global Witness's departure yesterday from the Kimberley Process raises questions about whether consumers can be sure the diamonds they buy aren't fuelling conflict. Global Witness cited what it called Kimberley Process failures in Ivory Coast, Venezuela and Zimbabwe.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Seychelles pleads for piracy intervention

The president of Seychelles is asking world leaders to address insecurity in Somalia with greater urgency to help lower the number of pirate attacks in the southern Indian Ocean.

President James Michel said yesterday that even though fewer pirate attacks are now successful, the southern Indian Ocean has seen an increase in attacks.

He said pirates are now better armed and resorting to "more desperate measures."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Kyoto commitment

Ottawa to spend $1.2B to help poor countries with their climate-change efforts U.S., one of the world's biggest polluters, hasn't ratified deal

SCHALK VAN ZUYDAM/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

▶ An activist wears a mask depicting the face of Prime Minister Stephen Harper at a protest in Durban, South Africa, yesterday.

Canada will not renew its commitment to the Kyoto Protocol, despite a tempting climate-change offer from China, Environment Minister Peter Kent said yesterday.

Kent said Canada will not sign on for a second Kyoto phase, even if doing so meant top polluter China would agree to targets to cut its own greenhouse gases. China has long refused to adopt binding treaty commitments to lower its greenhouse-gas emissions. But this weekend, China's top negotiator signalled that Beijing would consider a target if the European Union and developed nations — including Canada — first agreed to extend their Kyoto commitments.

China's olive branch did not sway Kent. When asked if the offer might get Canada to reconsider signing on for a second phase of Kyoto after it expires next year, the minister simply said no.

He said Canada's "fixation" is on sealing a deal made two years ago at a United Nations climate-change conference in the Danish capital of Copenhagen.

"Canada has made clear this year that Canada will not make a commitment to a second Kyoto period," Kent said.

The NDP's environment critic, MP Megan Leslie, said China's move puts Canada in a tough spot.

"The argument that China isn't doing anything, well, that's gone," she said.

"I'm left to ask, 'What is Canada's excuse now?'"

Jean Chretien's Liberal government joined Kyoto in 1998 but took little action to meet Canada's targets to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions.

The Conservatives also ignored Kyoto after they came to power in 2006. Canada has since set its own target of cutting emissions by 17 per cent from 2005 levels by 2020 — the same goal set by the Obama administration in Washington. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Condemnation

- Environmentalists have strongly condemned Canada for its position on climate change and its approach to dealing with greenhouse gas emissions.
- "Our loss of credibility on these issues didn't happen overnight," Queen's University biology professor John Smol said in a statement.
- "It's partly the result of ongoing neglect of environmental science at the federal level, but it also stems from a long history of broken promises, both to Canadians and to our global peers."

Witness recalls cat's screaming

JENNIFER TAPLIN IN HALIFAX

A cat was allegedly beaten to death in Halifax during an alcohol-fuelled rage over the weekend. And it's the sound of a wailing cat that neighbour Andrew Denton still can't get out of his head days later.

Denton and his girlfriend were in his apartment on Saturday night when he said they heard a thumping on the wall.

"It sounded like screaming and we moved in closer (to the wall) and it sounded like a cat," said Denton, who has two cats of his own.

A man lives next door and his girlfriend had recently moved in with her cat, Denton said.

RYAN TAPLIN/METRO HALIFAX

"I'll never forget the sound the cat made."
ANDREW DENTON, WITNESS

The superintendent got the man, who appeared drunk, to open his door. Denton said the cat was found under a bag in a bloody closet.

RCMP officers arrived and found the dead cat. They arrested a 48-year-old intoxicated man and later released him.

KINGSTON DEATHS

Expert testifies on honour killings

So-called honour killings stem from a loss of male control over women's bodies, and bloodshed is seen as a way to purify dishonour, an expert testified yesterday as the Crown wrapped up its case against a family accused of four such killings.

In some cultures, particularly in the Middle East, honour is valued more than life, and can often accompany declarations of love for the victims from the perpetrator, Shahrzad Mojab told court.

Mojab was the last witness to testify for the prosecution in the trial of a Montreal couple accused, along with their adult son, of killing their three daughters and the first wife in the family's polygamous marriage. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Group of 12 claims big $21M jackpot

A group of 12 people from Central Ontario have contacted lottery officials to say they plan to claim a $21-million Lotto Max jackpot.

OLG says the prize is from the Nov. 25 draw.

Spokesman Tony Bitonti says a member of the group told lottery officials there were about 12 winners, but did not say when they would claim the prize.

Radio station CIQB reports they all work at the Waypoint Centre for Mental Health Care in Penetanguishene. THE CANADIAN PRESS

More of us giving more to charity

Canadian taxfilers reported making charitable donations of just under $8.3 billion in 2010.

That's a 6.5 per cent increase over 2009.

Statistics Canada reports the number of donors also increased — 2.2 per cent to just over 5.7 million.

Data are based on income-tax returns filed for 2010.

The agency says 23.4 per cent of all taxfilers claimed charitable donations on their tax return, in line with previous years. THE CANADIAN PRESS

BILL GRAVELAND/THE CANADIAN PRESS

▶ Rabbits facing death.

Bunnies may get reprieve

A white knight has hopped into the fray to rescue bunnies facing the death penalty in Canmore, Alta.

The town has made international headlines for its plan to trap and gas its out-of-control feral rabbit population.

Animal Rescue Corps (ARC), a non-profit animal protection organization based in Washington, D.C., wants to capture, sterilize and relocate the rabbits. THE CANADIAN PRESS

2,000

According to Canmore officials, the population has hit the 2,000 mark — one rabbit for every six people in the town of 12,000.

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Planet similar to Earth found

- Kepler-22b is about 2.4 times the size of our home
- Space shuttle would take 22M years to get there

JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES

▶ Jill Tarter, director of the Center for SETI Research, looks at a graphic showing the newly discovered planet Kepler-22b at the NASA Ames Research Center yesterday in Moffett Field, Calif.

A newly discovered planet is eerily similar to Earth and is sitting outside Earth's solar system in what seems to be the ideal place for life, except for one hitch: It is a bit too big.

The planet is in the middle of what astronomers call the Goldilocks zone, that hard-to-find place that is not too hot, not too cold, where water, which is essential for life, does not freeze or boil. And it has a shopping-mall-like surface temperature of near 72 degrees, scientists say.

The planet's confirmation was announced yesterday by NASA along with other discoveries by its Kepler telescope, which was launched on a planet-hunting mission in 2009.

That is the first planet confirmed in the habitable zone for Kepler, which already had found Earth-like rocky planets elsewhere. Twice before astronomers have announced a planet found in that zone, but neither has been as promising. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Texas. Snowfall

▶ Jovonica Cortinez, left, 19, and her friend Angelina Llanez, 30, make a snowman yesterday in Purple Sage Park in Odessa, Texas.

MARK STERKEL/ODESSA AMERICAN/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Odessa gets 2.5 inches of snow

The National Weather Service indicated that Odessa had received about 2.5 inches of snow but that other parts of the area had received more.

300 A team at the University of California at Berkeley discovered two gigantic black holes in clusters of galaxies 300 million light years away.

Hole lotta nothin'

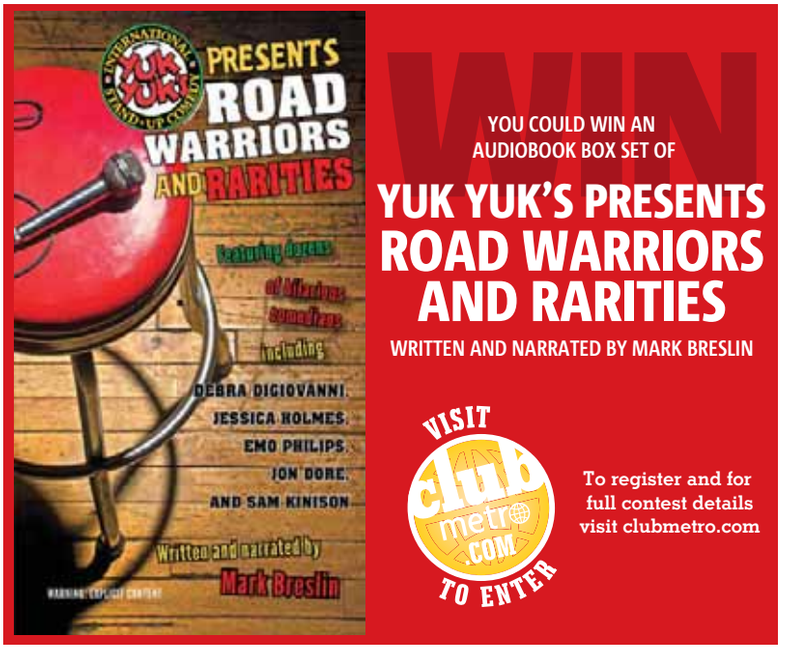
Scientists have found the biggest black holes known to exist — each one 10 billion times the size of our sun. The previous black-hole record-holder is as large as six billion suns. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Voyager in new region of solar system

More than three decades after launching, NASA's workhorse spacecraft is inching closer to leaving the solar system behind.

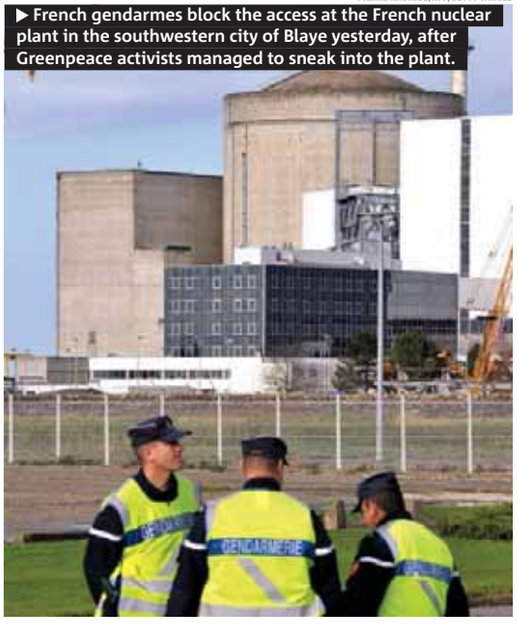
Currently 11 billion miles away from the sun, Voyager 1 has been exploring the fringes of the solar system since 2004. Scientists said yesterday the spacecraft has entered a new region in the solar system that they have dubbed the "stagnation zone."

Voyager 1 still has a little way to go before it completely exits the solar system and becomes the first man-made probe to cross into interstellar space, or the vast space between stars. The spacecraft has enough battery power to last until 2020, but scientists think it will reach interstellar space before that — in a matter of several months to years. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



Greenpeace invades French nuclear plant

PIERRE ANDRIEU/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



▶ French gendarmes block the access at the French nuclear plant in the southwestern city of Blaye yesterday, after Greenpeace activists managed to sneak into the plant.

Greenpeace activists invaded a French nuclear power plant site before dawn yesterday — a media stunt that deeply embarrassed the government as it was carrying out a safety review of France's crucial atomic energy sites.

In one of at least four near-simultaneous attempts to invade nuclear sites across France, nine activists sneaked into one plant in Nogent-sur-Seine southeast of Paris. Some scaled a domed containment building above a nuclear reactor to hoist a banner that read "safe nuclear doesn't exist" and paint an exclamation point, evoking danger, on the rooftop.

President Nicolas Sarkozy derided the "rather irresponsible" risks to lives, yet the guerilla-style tactics immediately stoked concerns about the vulnerability of France's nuclear facilities to terrorists or any other would-be invaders.

Activists who tried to enter three other French nuclear sites yesterday were prevented from doing so, but Greenpeace said other invaders were still holed up inside other, unspecified, nuclear sites. The environmental group even posted a video on its website of one whispering activist said to be speaking from inside a nuclear site under what looked like a white tent. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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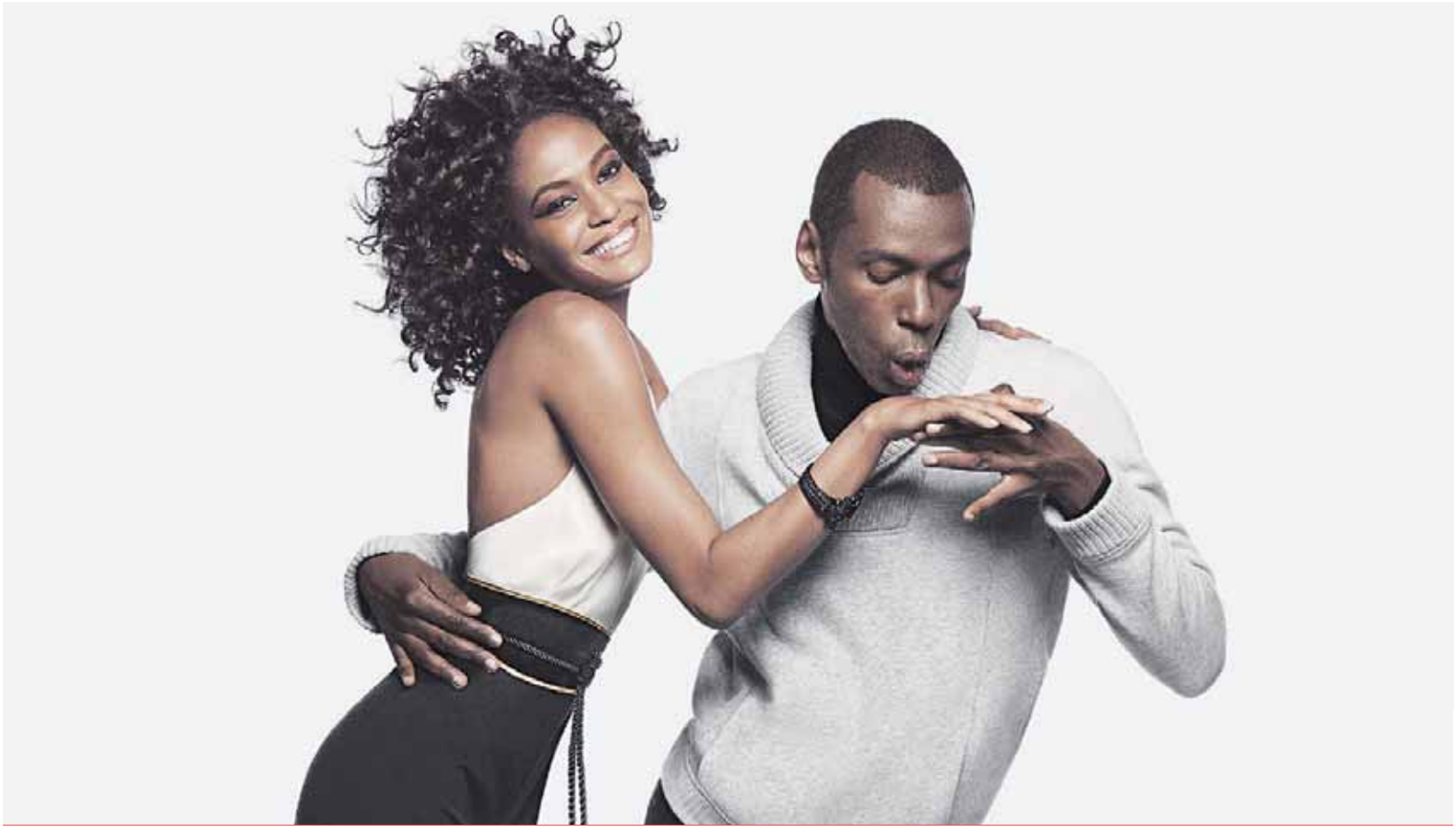

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Actress suing over nude pics

Pakistani actress Veena Malik is suing an Indian men's magazine over 'doctored' nude photos

Pakistani actress Veena Malik is suing a popular Indian men's magazine for millions of dollars, accusing it of publishing photos she says were doctored to make her appear nude, her lawyer said yesterday.

Malik's racy images in the December issue of FHM India has triggered a fury across her conservative Islamic country, with one cleric calling them a "shame for all Muslims."

The photo essay appears to make light of the military rivalry between India and Pakistan, nuclear-armed neighbours who have fought three wars.

In the cover photo, Malik is shown wearing no clothing, but with her arms and legs discreetly positioned to keep her covered. She has the letters ISI stencilled on her arm, representing Pakistan's powerful spy agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence agency.

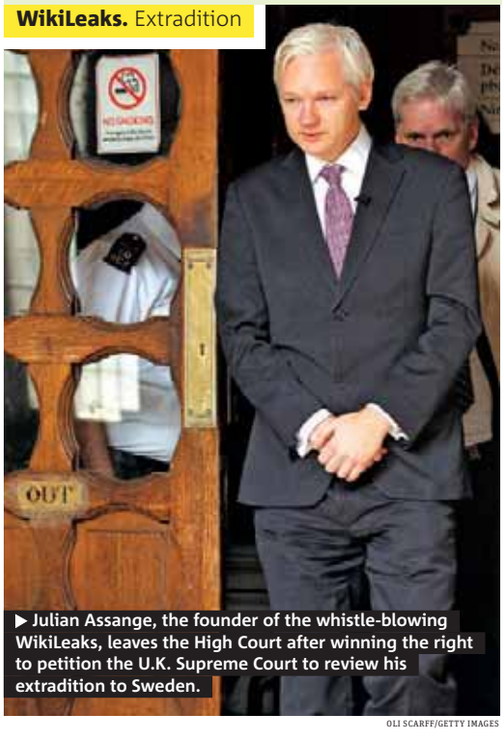
In a second photo, she is lying on a camouflage military helmet and in a third she is wearing what appears to be a green ammunition belt and pretending to pull the pin out of a grenade with her teeth. She appears to be topless in those images.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

AIJAZ RAH/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

▶ A copy of FHM India featuring Pakistani actress Veena Malik on the cover.

WikiLeaks. Extradition



▶ Julian Assange, the founder of the whistle-blowing WikiLeaks, leaves the High Court after winning the right to petition the U.K. Supreme Court to review his extradition to Sweden.

OLI SCARFF/GETTY IMAGES

Assange granted reprieve

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was granted permission by judges yesterday to continue his legal battle to avoid extradition to Sweden over sex-crime allegations — but was warned that his chances of success are slim. The decision means Assange won't face immediate deportation, and is likely to spend a second Christmas living under curfew in England.

Transgender inmate appeals case dismissal

70 De'Lonta is serving more than 70 years for robbery, drugs and other charges.

A transgender Virginia inmate has appealed the dismissal of her lawsuit asking the state to pay for her to have a sex-change operation, saying a jury should decide if hormones and other therapies she receives are adequate.

U.S. District Judge James Turk tossed out Ophelia De'Lonta's lawsuit in October, saying the state was adequately treating her gender-identity disorder, a mental diagnosis in which people believe they were born the wrong sex. Turk said courts have ruled that inmates are guaranteed only minimum care, not preferred therapies.

De'Lonta, who was born a man, claims her disorder causes her to attempt castration and that the surgery is necessary.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Xbox rolls out new interface

Microsoft Corp. is rolling out a new interface for its Xbox game-console users — one that allows you to navigate through music, movies, TV shows and games with the wave of your hand or the sound of your voice.

The interface, first demonstrated by CEO Steve Ballmer in September, is set up similarly to Microsoft Corp.'s upcoming Windows 8 operating system with a series of large panes showing content options.

Xbox owners with the Kinect motion controller can swipe through screens by waving their hand in the air. It also responds to direct voice commands, and incorporates Microsoft's search engine, Bing. Windows phone users can control what to watch or hear by tapping on their portable devices.

Online download

- The interface will be available to Xbox users connected to the Internet via a download today.

Separate subscriptions are required for services like Netflix, and much of the content also requires being a gold member of Xbox Live, a connected Internet service that costs $60 a year.

Microsoft says there have been 57 million Xbox units sold around the world and there are more than 35 million users who have logged on to its Xbox Live service at least once in the last three months. It did not divulge how many Xbox Live users are paying gold members. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Postal. Cutbacks

▶ U.S. Postal Service letter carrier Juan Padilla walks his delivery route yesterday in San Francisco.

JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES

Sending the message

The U.S. Postal Service is considering a plan to eliminate its first-class next-day delivery for stamped letters as well as closing half of its 487 mail-processing plants across the country in an effort to cut costs and avoid bankruptcy. The postal service made the announcement yesterday.

Facebook opening new unit in N.Y.C.

Facebook is hiring.

As potential investors wait to see if the 800-million-member social network will go public with a share offering in the second quarter of 2012, it continues to add to its workforce.

On Friday, Facebook chief operating officer Cheryl Sandberg announced at a New York City press conference that the company is opening an engineering division at its Madison Ave. offices.

According to a report from Fox News, Facebook currently has only 100 employees in Manhattan. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Job openings

- Yesterday morning, there were 277 job openings at Facebook offices around the world — including two marketing-related jobs at its lone Canadian outpost, above Toronto's Eglinton subway station.

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Income inequality rising: Report

Economic growth doesn't trickle down to the poorest, OECD finds

Governments need to do more to address a growing gap between rich and poor in Canada and around the world by fostering more and better jobs and even considering raising taxes, a global economic think-tank says in a new report.

Among its findings, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development reported that the average income of the top 10 per cent of Canadian earners in 2008 was $103,500 — 10 times that of the bottom 10 per cent at $10,260.

The ratio for Canada in the early 1990s was about eight to one.

While the OECD study reaches only to 2008 — just as the recession kicked in around the globe — that kind of income inequality has been at the heart of the Occupy Wall Street protests across the U.S. and Canada.

The report found the gap between rich and poor in its member countries had reached the highest level in more than 30 years in 2008, with the average income of the richest 10 per cent now about nine times that of the poorest 10 per cent.

"Greater inequality does not foster social mobility," OECD secretary general Angel Gurria said in the release of the report.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Canada's record

- **Finance Minister Jim Flaherty defended the government's record on job creation.** "The OECD and the IMF say that Canada's economic growth, job creation will be the best going forward. That's how you address inequality," he told Parliament.
- **However, NDP Finance critic Peter Julian said the government was not doing enough.** "We have government that attacks the whole issue of economic policy in a one-dimensional frame, and that is cutting taxes for Canada's biggest companies," Julian said.

SEAN KILPATRICK/THE CANADIAN PRESS

▶ Finance Minister Jim Flaherty speaks during question period in the House of Commons in Ottawa yesterday.

Canadian airline traffic up in November

Three of Canada's largest airlines reported strong passenger traffic in November.

Air Canada says system traffic was up three per cent from November 2010. WestJet reported its traffic increased 4.4 per cent year over year. Porter Airlines reported record November load factor of 65.9 per cent.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Manufacturers looking to hire next year

Half of Canadian manufacturers surveyed in a poll say they're looking to hire next year, but they expect to face trouble finding workers with the right expertise.

A third-quarter report by PwC says a flurry of activity in the Canadian mining, energy and aerospace industries is creating demand — but employers say there's a lack of skilled workers. THE CANADIAN PRESS

RIM fires executives charged on flight

Two top BlackBerry executives who got so drunk on an Air Canada flight that it had to be diverted to Vancouver last week are no longer employed at Research In Motion, the company said yesterday. George Campbell and Paul Alexander Wilson have pleaded guilty to one charge of mischief. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

RIM's image could suffer after incident

The head of Research In Motion's operations in Indonesia could face charges related to a stampede at a recent promotional sale where dozens of consumers were injured, another incident that could tarnish RIM's brand.

Canadian Andrew Cobham was among four suspects who is facing possible charges of negligence leading to injury, Jakarta police spokesman Col. Baharudin Djafar said yesterday.

The crime carries a maximum penalty of nine months in prison.

Dozens were injured and several people fainted at the Nov. 25 debut of RIM's BlackBerry Bold 9790 in Jakarta.

There were reports that 5,000 people attended, drawn by a 50 per cent discount to the first 1,000 shoppers.

Research In Motion said it sincerely regrets that some customers were injured and others experienced frustration and upset.

"RIM is actively co-operating with the authorities who are investigating this incident," RIM said in a statement.

Indonesia has experienced a tech frenzy in recent years, and RIM has benefited from the growth and the popularity of its BlackBerry Messenger service. With six million users, BlackBerry is more popular in Indonesia than smartphones from other makers.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

TATAN SYUFLANA/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

▶ Indonesians rush to the lineup to buy the new BlackBerry Bold 9790 at a shopping mall in Jakarta last Friday.

Market moment

PRICES AS OF 5 P.M. YESTERDAY

TSX	Dollar
+ 44.24 (12,119.33)	+ 0.15¢ (98.35¢ US)

Oil	Natural gas	Gold
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A CONSUMMATE DATER'S HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

SHE SAYS ...

JESSICA NAPIER
METRO

We all know the holidays aren't really about the gifts; they're about togetherness and a little bit of gluttony. But, even though presents aren't mandatory, you still might want to indulge that special someone in your life. However, the last thing you want is to appear cheap or inappropriately extravagant in front of a new (or new-ish) beau.

And, sure, it really is the thought that counts — but you certainly don't want your new mate thinking, "Oh, you got me a new watch? Gee, I didn't think we were there yet."

Whether you're just getting to know each other, happily dating or settling down, the different stages in a relationship warrant various types of festive indulgences. If you're not sure on the proper present etiquette for your particular dating scenario, here are some appropriate gift ideas that will ensure your budding relationship lasts into the new year.

Just met: Dating for less than a month

You've been on a couple of dates and, hey, maybe this is going somewhere, but you're still not all that sure. You haven't even had "the talk" and now you're pressured into an awkward gift-giving situation. Don't panic. Avoid going over the top and stick with small tokens, edibles or the ultimate icebreaker — alcohol.

> **"... chances are you've been through enough gift-giving events to know how to make each other happy. Just remember: despite your good intentions there's really nothing romantic about home appliances."**

Brand new beaus: One to four months

Ah, yes, new-relationship bliss; you're getting to know one another but haven't yet figured out each other's flaws. In the honeymoon phase, you'll be tempted to go all out on a gift, but it's probably still too soon to spoil your partner with something lavish. Show your new sweetheart you're smitten (without breaking the bank) with a sexy new scent or tickets to a show or sporting event.

Getting serious: Four months to a year

Now that you're settling down, you'll want to start making some memories together. Skip the tangible gifts and take your relationship on the road for a much-needed romantic getaway after all the meet-the-parents holiday stress.

Committed coupledom: A year or more

OK, now you can give in to your urges on those big-ticket items without feeling like maybe it's a bit too much. Go ahead and splurge on jewelry, electronics and other unrestrained gifts that say, "We're in a committed relationship."

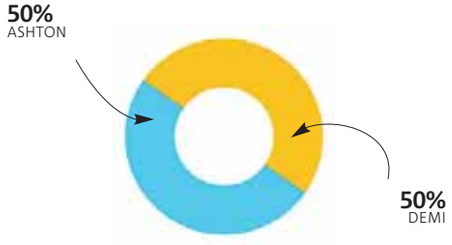
In it for the long haul: Married

You don't need any help here — chances are you've been through enough gift-giving events to know how to make each other happy. Just remember: despite your good intentions there's really nothing romantic about home appliances.

Read more of Jessica Napier's columns at metronews.ca/shesays

Panel **Register at metropolitanpanel.ca and take the quick poll**

Who's the more eligible bachelor(ette), Ashton or Demi?



Local tweets

@Arash Madani: Wally Buono will be the VP of football ops and GM of the #BCLions next year. He will not coach in 2012. Little surprise in today's #CFL news

@tylergreen1040: Wally Buono retires as @BCLions head coach, stays with team as Vice President of Football Operations and General Manager. #BCLions #CFL

@Boldtcom: Shout out to my peeps at #vaninaug at the Village on False Creek - and congrats to trustees being sworn in later today. #proud #shazam

@CFL: BREAKING: Wally Buono steps down as head coach of B.C. Lions - bit.ly/vn0ywC Will stay on board as General Manager #CFL #BCLions

@Linny_B: That's right, #canucks killed it, beat the #flames into the ground and I couldn't have been more proud for my fave player #masonraymond

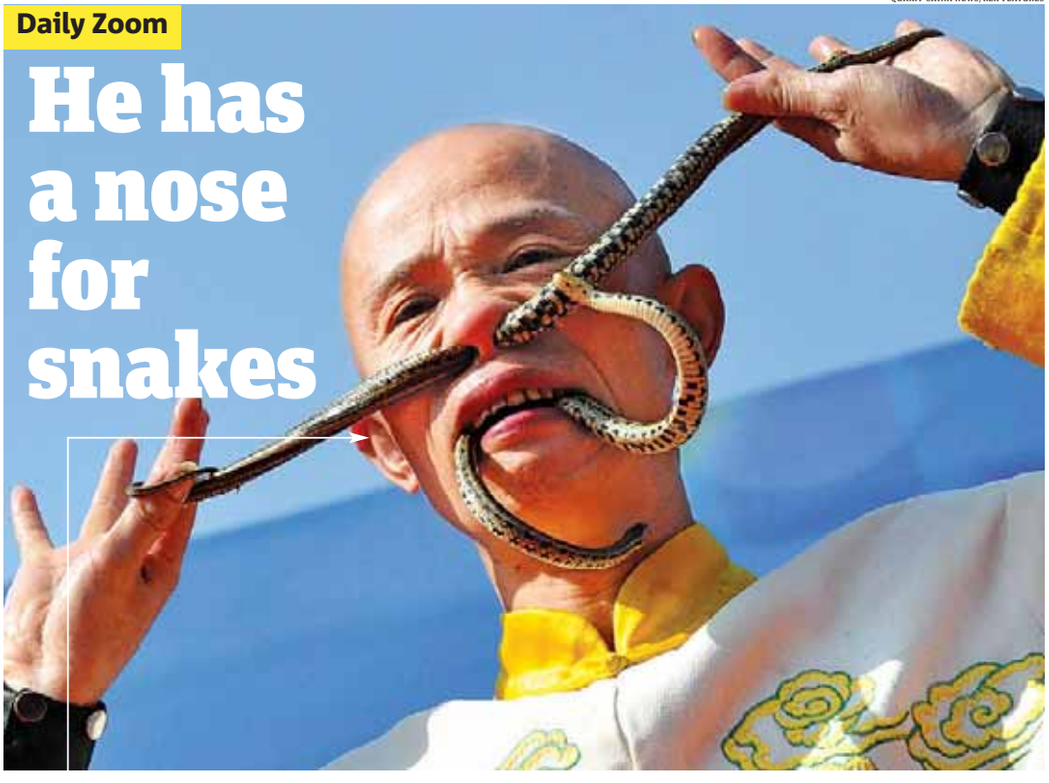
@reporterchris: The #canucks have recalled Victor Oreskovich from AHL Chicago.

@SteveintheKT: Higgins with Staph. Luongo trade rumors. Looks like Gillis has had enough of Roberto's no flip flop policy in the team shower. #Canucks

QUIRKY CHINA NEWS/REX FEATURES

Daily Zoom

He has a nose for snakes



Serpents invade man's orifices

NANNING, CHINA. This performance artist has certainly poked his nose into some slithery business. Liu Fei threads two snakes from both nostrils and out of his mouth at Nanning Zoo in Guangxi province, south China.

DLUOGS/FLICKR

Another artist, Liu Xin, performed a headstand on top of a nail.

METRO WORLD NEWS

Snakeman Liu

- **Adept at handling snakes.** Liu Fei, 40, is nicknamed Snake King Asia.
- **Several snakes at once.** He can handle up to three three-foot-long cauliflower snakes.
- **During a TV show** Liu managed to let a foot-long snake crawl through his nose and mouth.

9

Nine snakes in a human mouth is the Guinness World Record. It was set in Texas in 2003 by Jackie Biddy. He gathered the bunch of snakes by their rattles and put the tails into his mouth and held still for 10 seconds.

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A real, honest comedy

The Sitter director David Gordon Green talks about working with Jonah Hill on his latest comedy Says that Hill doesn't hold back what he's feeling and that makes for great laughs

STEVE GOW
SCENE@METRONEWS.CA

HANDOUT

In The Sitter, Jonah Hill plays a terrible babysitter who takes his charges out on a night filled with drugs, bar fights and exploding toilets.

Jonah Hill is an unlikely star. After rising to fame in Superbad and co-starring alongside Brad Pitt in the acclaimed drama Moneyball, the private actor is now taking charge in his own comedy The Sitter.

"What I love about him is he's real," said director David Gordon Green recently from Austin, Texas. "He doesn't hide his feelings. "He tells you what he thinks without a lot of fake smiles and it comes across as an actor too. It comes across in a vehicle like The Sitter as real funny."

Having made big-screen comedies like Pineapple Express and this year's Your Highness, Green knows funny.

But the award-winning filmmaker also knows honesty.

After all, his career in cinema began with acclaimed dramas like All the Real Girls.

It's an interesting career twist for the director now behind this Friday's release about a terrible babysitter who takes his charges out on a wild night involving drugs, bar fights and exploding toilets.

"I had exercised at the level of exhaustion a lot of my personal emotion in my movies so it got really heartbreaking because no one would go see them," said Green of his move into more mainstream comedy.

"I was just kind of looking at my career thinking I'm making stuff for myself and I'd like the experience of making stuff that people would go see," he said.

In fact, disappointing returns on Your Highness almost drove Green back to serious cinema.

That is, until the subversive script for The Sitter showed up.

"When I read The Sitter, I thought it had a lot of great honesty and dimension to a comedy and could bridge two interests of mine," said Green.

"It was also the first movie anyone asked me if I wanted to make. I'd never heard those words before."

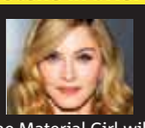
Jonah Lite

The Sitter marks Jonah Hill's last film before he dramatically dropped over 30 pounds of weight.

- "It's right toward the end of this movie that he started dieting and getting healthy," said Green. "It certainly became a really tremendous step for him to take and it's been cool to be a part of that transition."
- And Green has something to say to cynics who claim the weight loss will impact Hill's career. "It sucks that people don't give you the benefit of the doubt at first but its just something professionally – you're in the spotlight, you have to prove it to everybody."

2 scene

Scene in brief



The Material Girl will be taking the stage on football's biggest night. Madonna, who has sold more than 300 million records, will perform at halftime of the Super Bowl in Indianapolis. The NFL and NBC announced Sunday during the Detroit-New Orleans game that the Grammy Award-winning singer will highlight the show at Lucas Oil Stadium on Feb. 5.
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Band Perry reflects on amazing year as they return to youth-themed American Country Awards

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Old enough to know better

Are veteran actresses being put out to pasture by Hollywood? Industry insiders say there's an ageism gap

A million-dollar lawsuit by an actress who claims her job prospects were damaged when she was outed online as a 40-year-old has run smack into conventional wisdom: If Sandra Bullock, 47, and Helen Mirren, 66, are getting steady work, bias against older actresses surely must have vanished.

Film stars Meryl Streep, Halle Berry and Glenn Close are also members of the 40-plus and employed club. On TV, the majority of the Desperate Housewives female leads are nearing 50, while Emmy Award-winning Julianna Margulies of The Good Wife is 44.

But industry insiders and unions say star power obscures the ageism gap between high-profile performers and working stiffs — a unique aspect of Hollywood's division of the haves and have-nots.

"There is a tendency for all of us to think of the actors we see all the time and whose names we know," said Duncan Crabtree-Ireland, the Screen Actors Guild's deputy national executive director and general counsel.

"But the vast majority of characters on TV and film are portrayed by people we don't know and who are struggling to make a living as an actor," he said.

Older actresses face more hiring hurdles than their male counterparts, according to employment statistics from SAG and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists.

Women over 40 make up 24.3 per cent of the U.S. population, the 2010 census found. In comparison, union casting analysis show actresses over 40 years old get 12.5 per cent of roles for television and film.

Men of that age are also about a quarter of the population but nearly equal their ranks in casting. (Television doesn't do well by women overall, who are 50.8 per cent of the U.S. population but are seen in only a quarter of roles.)

The picture is no prettier when it comes to earnings in the youth-obsessed industry. In 2010, for example, actresses ages 41 to 50 working in SAG-covered film and TV projects earned a total $58 million — compared to the $160 million paid to actors in that age group.

The guild is heartened by the high-profile older actresses who are finding work, especially on TV, and Crabtree-Ireland said, "We hope that this will be the beginning of a trend for all of our members, but our data doesn't show that."

Among the groundbreakers are Close, 64, of Damages and the upcoming theatrical release Albert Nobbs; Kyra Sedgwick, 46, of The Closer; and Marg Helgenberger, 52, CSI: Crime Scene Investigation.

That's progress, given that superstar Bette Davis was 42 when she played an aging actress on the brink of irrelevance in All About Eve (1950) and was 56 when she starred as an elderly "spinster" descending into madness in Hush ... Hush, Sweet Charlotte (1964).

Compare that to Dana Delaney and her role as a smart, sexy medical examiner in Body of Proof. Delaney turns 56 next March.

"It's a miracle I'm still working," said Salma Hayek, 45.

"They told me you'll never work because I have the accent. ... They told me you're not going to work after 35 or 30, and I've never been busier in my life."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHOTOS: THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

▶ Industry insiders say star power obscures the ageism gap between high-profile actresses and those struggling to make it.

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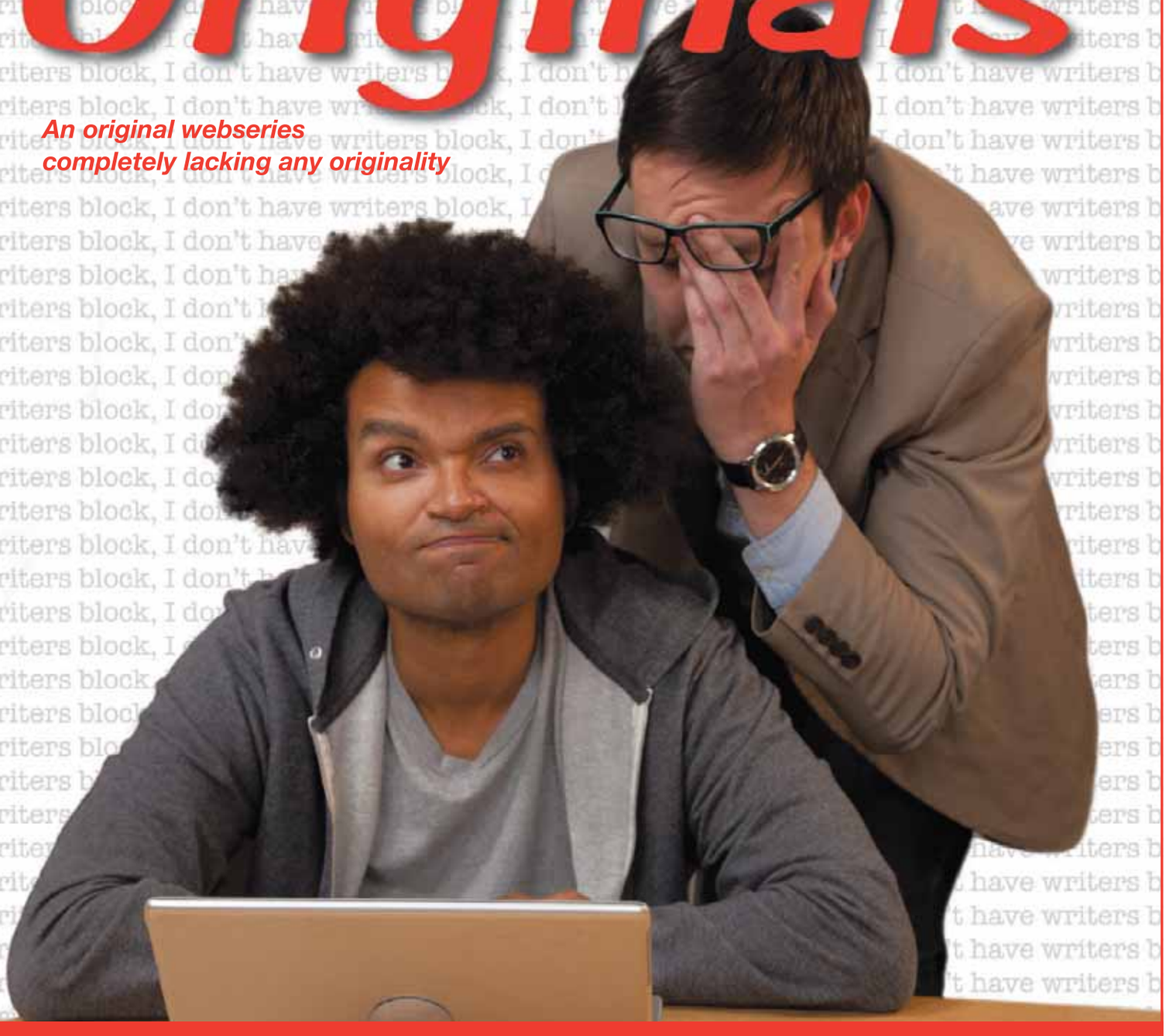
From a writer of "The Office"...

Originals

An original webseries completely lacking any originality



In today's episode... "What's the Deal?"

After the debacle that was their first attempt at shooting a pilot for their sitcom, Jason and Bryce get back on the horse again and Jason has a wardrobe malfunction almost as embarrassing as a certain half-time show.

New episodes post every Tuesday and Thursday. Watch at www.facebook.com/OriginalsTheSeries

DVD Releases

Buy it | Rent it | Borrow it | Yawn | Don't bother

The Help

Genre: Drama
Director: Tate Taylor
Stars: Emma Stone, Viola Davis, Octavia Spencer

Oscar-worthy performances by Viola Davis and Octavia Spencer elevate this 1960s-set Deep South drama above any accusations of medicinal moviemaking.

They play Mississippi maids Aibileen and Minny, who clean the homes and raise the children of their white employers, yet who aren't considered part of the household — the black help isn't even allowed the basic human courtesy of using an indoor toilet.

Based on the Kathryn Stockett's bestselling 2009 novel, Tate Taylor's movie explodes the bogus concept of "polite racism," in which ladies in white gloves pretend to somehow be different from Jim Crow rednecks in their treatment of minorities.

Emma Stone's rebellious Skeeter is the notable exception, defying the status quo with a tell-all book she's writing that gives the maid's view of oppression. When Aibileen and Minny speak, the film becomes alive and the '60s suddenly seem a lot less progressive than they were deemed to be. It was a long and painful road from the outhouse to the White House.

Extras include deleted scenes and making-of featurettes.

PETER HOWELL

Cowboys & Aliens

Genre: Action
Director: Jon Favreau
Stars: Daniel Craig, Harrison Ford, Olivia Wilde

This mash-up of western and sci-fi clichés never fully saddles up or reaches for the stars. Still, it ropes you in. The movie gets by on the strength of its agreeable talent, who enjoy playing along and can endure the horse manure and space goo being shovelled.

Director Jon Favreau (Iron Man) and his six writers stick to genre basics, setting taciturn earthlings with itchy trigger fingers against alien invaders who, as usual, want to plunder the planet, this time for our gold.

An impressive cast headed by Daniel Craig and Harrison Ford, the men behind James Bond and Indiana Jones, enliven an unremarkable screenplay that draws heavily on previous films. Think Stagecoach and Rio Bravo melded with Aliens and Independence Day and you've nailed the ho-hum plot.

Along for the ride are Olivia Wilde, Paul Dano, Sam Rockwell, Keith Carradine, among other earthlings. There's also a cute little doggie, who gits along in nearly every scene.

What's missing from the film is any real sense of wonder, or personal stake in the proceedings. It could have been so much more.

Extras include a director's commentary and a making-of featurette.

PETER HOWELL

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The Hangover Part II

Genre: Comedy
Director: Todd Phillips
Stars: Bradley Cooper, Zach Galifianakis, Ed Helms

The lengthy credits to The Hangover Part II miss a key contributor: the Xerox machine that simply copied the script of the zany original. Part II is everything the first movie was, and less. What's it missing? Laughs and intelligence, for starters.

The Hangover was funny because it took the cliché of naughty boys at a Las Vegas bachelor party and made it into a shambolic detective thriller. The joke wasn't the lads trashing their hotel room; it was their trying to figure out how it happened, and how they misplaced the groom in the process.

Part II moves the action from Vegas to Bangkok, where a new groom is wedding a Thai bride, and there are a few new faces. But in virtually every other regard, it's a stale rehash of the original, losing the element of surprise that was critical to its success.

The shift to Thailand affords director Todd Phillips the opportunity to unleash rude humour about hapless Americans abroad, and unleash it they do, with profane, sexist and racist remarks that never should have made it past the first script reading. Extras include making-of featurettes and a gag reel.

PETER HOWELL

Why music feels good

It gets dark early these days, which can lead to depression But you've got a tool right in your pocket Music can profoundly change your mood, and we talked to experts about why

ROMINA MCGUINNESS
SCENE@METRONEWS.CA
METRO WORLD NEWS IN LONDON

GETTY IMAGES

▶ Beyoncé looks happy. She must have just been listening to her own music.

Isn't it amazing, while flipping through your iTunes collection, how hearing each song affects your mood so significantly? One can make you feel light and bouncy; another can instantly take you to a dark, depressing place, vaguely connected to some past memory. Why does this happen? As Van Halen once sang: "Somebody get me a doctor!"

Hey, here's one now:

"Once the emotional link to music is established, our neurological reactions are profound," confirms Dr. Concetta Tomaino, director of the Institute for Music and Neurologic Function in New York. "Our brain creates hard-wired responses to certain situations that are repeated when listening to the music."

Memories are key

As is chemistry: The personal connection you have to certain songs triggers the release of feel good chemicals in the brain such as dopamine, and serotonin, the same ones released when taking drugs such as cocaine or ecstasy, providing an adrenalin rush and a feeling of euphoria.

Hormonal changes also occur: "Your brain triggers the release of the 'cuddle' hormone oxytocin, that promotes feelings of love and trust," says another doc, Dr. Michael De Georgia, director of Music and Medicine at University Hospitals Case Medical Center.

And like any good psychological issue, your mom may also come into play. Maegan Morrow, music therapist at the TIRR Memorial Hermann Rehabilitation Hospital in Houston, believes that our connection with music comes from the way we were nurtured — "a certain voice could make you think of your mother's lullabies, or a band you used to listen to in your prime party days," she says.

Music matters, too

A song's structure also makes an impact. Tomaino says anything faster than normal walking tempo makes us feel energized. But according to De Georgia, the key to an elating song is one whose rhythm is at the same frequency as our heart beat, an average of 60 to 80 beats per minute.

Anything below 60 beats is both sad and relaxing whereas anything above 80 can either rev you up, or cause anxiety.

"Rock music can make you feel euphoric but a frequency too much above heart beat causes your brain to release stress hormones," he explains.

Morrow describes rhythm as an external force to which our bodies align. "Our bodies are rhythmic; our steps, our heart beat, our breath. Rhythm brings structure to the environment and the body behaves like an oscillator trying to align with that beat to fit into that structure," she says.

The happiest tunes

Feelings of happiness are strongly linked to key tone: "Minor keys are often associated with depression and sadness and major keys with feeling happy," says De Georgia. Also, higher pitched, generally female sounds are thought to be comforting. But sometimes, it just comes down to you loving the song. "When we know a song's tonal structure, we feel comfortable," says De Georgia. "Brilliant musicians such as Mozart and The Beatles managed to tweak a song just outside of the 'comfort zone', making it unique without entirely losing the plot and going off beat," he adds. So don't fear the winter blues. Here comes the sun.

Top feel goods

1. **Shake it Out, Florence + the Machine:** This is the song version of a drum roll. Filled with anticipation.
2. **Smile, Lily Allen:** Her voice is soft and sweet and this song literally makes you want to smile.
3. **California Gurls, Katy Perry:** perfect background beat and her high pitched but even voice make you want to get up and dance.
4. **Happy Up Here, Röyksopp:** The sonic equivalent of a rubber bouncing ball, this, from the Norwegian electronic music duo, feels "up."
5. **Countdown, Beyoncé:** powerful voice, regular beat and high tone.

Top feel bads

Depressing songs or albums

1. **Dido:** Any song of hers is borderline depressing. Her pitch is monotonous and lacks stimulation.
2. **Let Down, Radiohead:** In fact, the whole OK Computer album sparks a deeply-felt but not unpleasant melancholy.

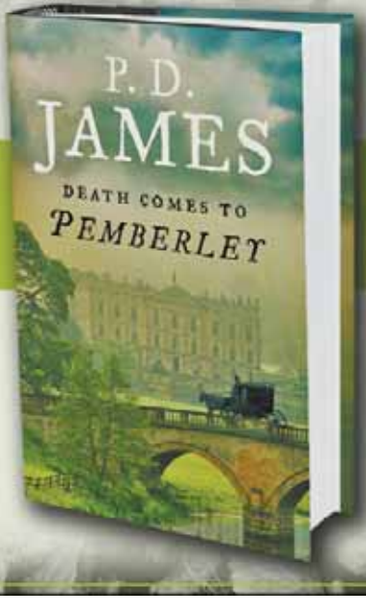
"P. D. James takes *Pride and Prejudice* to places it never dreamed of..."
–London Evening Standard

P.D. JAMES

"In a stroke of genius, she has combined our love of Jane Austen and a good murder story in her new novel."
—Daily Mail

DEATH COMES TO PEMBERLEY

"As good as anything P. D. James has written and that is very high praise indeed."
—Sunday Express



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Housewives more gloom than glamour?

Report alleges Beverly Hills Housewife Kim Richards enters rehab

THE WORD

DOROTHY ROBINSON
SCENE@METRONEWS.CA

I always thought the "point" of the Real Housewives franchise was to show us, the common people, how glamorous and lovely it is being stinking rich.

But The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills just makes me grateful for my overdrawn MasterCard.

As you may remember, four months ago, cast member Taylor Armstrong's husband killed himself, reportedly over financial problems.

Now, Entertainment Tonight is reporting that cast member Kim Richards is in rehab. In previous episodes of the show, Richards admitted to taking anti-anxiety and anti-depressant medications, as well as an anti-seizure medication that can be used to treat alcoholism (meaning: Richards isn't a person who just has one too many glasses of wine at dinner; she's probably hiding hooch around the house).

It's sad. Everything about this show is sad. And maybe everyone on this show would be happier and healthier if they stopped trying to impress the Joneses and downgraded their materialistic lives into something a little more manageable and normal.

Sometimes you just have to blow dry your own hair and vacuum your own floors, you know?

ALL PHOTOS GETTY IMAGES

▶ Kim Richards

Celebrity tweets

@PSchwarzenegger

Meeting after meeting after meeting today. In desperate need of jacuzzi

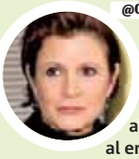
@Colin_Hanks

The city of Hollywood has the sleaziest collection of car washes. Not all of the greater LA area mind you. Just the city itself.

@MissKelly0

ahhhh i hate some of the people in my building some a--hole just put my clothes in the dryer and ruined all my new clothes! i want to cry!

@CarrieFFisher



Tom Brokaw and I trying to reminisce about a sexual encounter we'd both forgotten.

Beyoncé has got plenty of protection

Beyoncé isn't bothered by rumours that have circulated since she announced her pregnancy — including talk that she's been wearing a fake pregnancy stomach while a surrogate secretly carries her child.

"You know, there are certain things that are so far, it doesn't even affect me," she tells Katie Couric in an interview.

"I'm cool. It doesn't bother me." However, the same can't be said for her family.

"My mom is like, 'Nobody's talking about my grandbaby! My grandbaby's not even here yet!'" Beyoncé says. "I was like 'Calm down, mom! It's OK!' My mom and sister are so protective."

METRO

Beyoncé

Sheen to the rescue?

When Brooke Mueller was arrested in Colorado over the weekend on assault and drug charges, it was ex-husband Charlie Sheen to the rescue, according to Radar Online.

Sources say Mueller first contacted her parents for help with her $11,000 bail, but they refused.

"They actually wanted to leave her in jail," a source says.

"Brooke's family is done with her, she has to get straight or she is going to die." Luckily, Sheen was more than happy to post bail on her behalf.

METRO

▶ Brooke Mueller

▶ Giuliana Rancic

Giuliana Rancic to get double mastectomy

Giuliana Rancic, 36, once the poster child for infertility, is now, sadly, the spokeswoman for another terrible affliction: She announced yesterday on the Today Show that she will have a double mastectomy after lumpectomies failed to completely eradicate her breast cancer.

She says the reason for the dramatic procedure is twofold.

"For me, it was important to get the cancer out," she says. "That's what I wanted to do, just get it out."

And she also didn't want to delay trying for a baby with husband Bill Rancic, 40, as having another lumpectomy-radiation option would have meant delaying pregnancy for a few years.

"I couldn't be more at peace with the decision. But it's hard, and I still break down some nights. ... But I'm OK."

Best of luck with your recovery, Giuliana. METRO

Biel dug the belly

For Jessica Biel, pregnancy would be a blast — if her role in New Year's Eve is any indication.

In the ensemble romantic comedy, Biel plays an expectant mother, and playing with extra padding took a lot of pressure off the actress.

"It was so good! I had a (pregnant belly) suit on ... and I had the biggest boobs," the actress tells British talk show host Graham Norton. "I ate whatever I wanted — it was great!"

METRO

▶ Jessica Biel

Dig your own grave by shovelling snow

Study shows once again danger associated with clearing the drive

CELIA MILNE
LIFE@METRONEWS.CA

Shovelling: It's not for the faint of heart.

When the next snow storm hits, think twice about grabbing that shovel to clear the walk.

Especially if you are male, inactive, have a weak heart, and smoke.

In a recent study, researchers at Queen's University in Kingston, Ont., looked back over the medical records of 500 people with heart problems who arrived in the winter-time at Kingston General Hospital (KGH) Emergency room.

The team found that 35 (seven per cent) of these patients had noticed their first symptoms while shovelling snow. It may not sound like a huge percentage, but in medicine it is very significant, says Dr. Adrian Baranchuk, associate professor of medicine at Queen's University and a cardiologist at KGH, lead author of the study.

He guesses there are plenty more people who didn't mention they were shovelling snow when their symptoms started. Of the 35 who developed problems while shovelling, 31 were male.

"The group at highest risk is men with family history of heart attacks or cardiovascular disease," says Baranchuk.

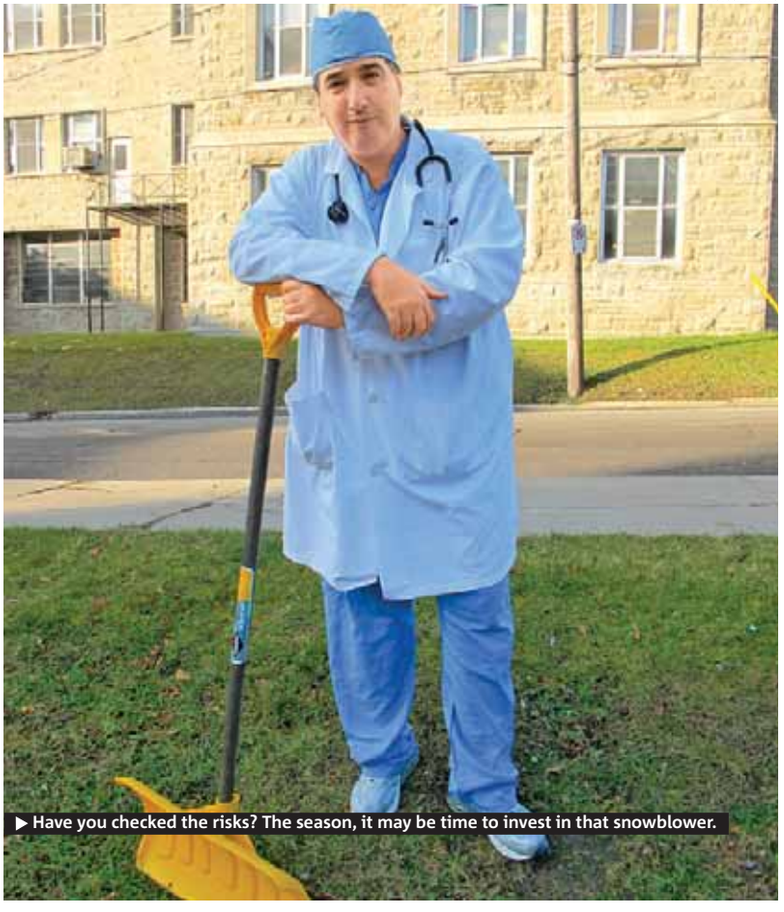
"You're also in the highest-risk group if you have coronary artery disease and you smoke." If you're a woman and you have no family history of coronary artery disease, you are at low risk, he adds.

An earlier Harvard University newsletter describes how problems develop. Sudden physical exertion, such as shovelling, can put a big strain on the heart and make blood more likely to clot.

When a clot forms inside a coronary artery, it can block blood flow to part of the heart.

Deprived of their supply of oxygen and nutrients, heart muscle cells begin to shut down, and then die. This is a heart attack.

ISTOCK PHOTOS



▶ Have you checked the risks? The season, it may be time to invest in that snowblower.

Best Health Minute

BONNIE MUNDAY, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, BEST HEALTH MAGAZINE

The checklist that can save your life We've all heard medical horror stories: the Ontario doctor who operated on a patient for a blood clot, drilling a nickel-sized hole into the right side of the patient's skull — yet the clot was on the left side.

Then there are the stories about medical staff leaving surgical gauze and other items inside patients.

As writer Camilla Cornell found out for her story in the December issue of Best Health, out of the estimated two million surgeries performed in Canada each year, there are complications in 11 per cent of those, resulting in pneumonia, stroke and kidney failure, among others.

But a potent new tool has recently emerged in the fight to keep a lid on surgical complications.

It isn't an innovative new drug or an expensive piece of equipment.

It's a simple, low-cost procedure developed by the World Health Organization, and it's surprisingly effective.

The Surgical Safety Checklist requires everyone on the surgical team to double-check 19 different items before and after surgery; examples include whether antibiotics have been administered at the correct time prior to surgery (important in preventing infection) and whether the area for surgery has been marked on the patient's body.

Seems pretty logical that these steps would be taken without a list, but according to one of our medical sources, including the steps on a checklist is important because the complexity of medical care today increases the potential for human error.

And the checklist seems effective.

In hospitals around the world that use it, one study found that complications from surgery dropped by about one third, and the in-hospital death rate dropped by an astounding 40 per cent.

The Surgical Safety Checklist became a required operational practice in Canada this year, but that doesn't mean all hospitals and all doctors are actually using it, according to our Best Health sources.

To get advice for what you can do if you or someone you love is getting surgery soon, check out the December issue of Best Health on newsstands now.

TO CLAIM YOUR FREE ISSUE OF BEST HEALTH, GO TO BESTHEALTHMAG.CA/METRONEWS

3 life

A new study shows

Yaeba teeth: Cute or...?

Gap teeth are so last year; cosmetic dentists in Japan are now being flooded with requests for crooked teeth. Move over Lara Stone and let Kirsten Dunst take centre stage. Why did we bother spending our teenage years with metal braces digging into our gums if crooked was cool all along? Maybe because resembling a five year old is just a little creepy.

METRO WORLD NEWS

Sleep pattern consistency key to conquering Sunday night insomnia

The 'Bel' of the lunch scene

Bel Café serves delicious gourmet sandwiches & freshly baked pastries

LUNCH RUSH

ERIN IRELAND
FOOD@METRONEWS.CA

'Cutthroat' best describes Vancouver's sandwich scene.

No longer is the popular lunch food built by 'sandwich artists' as often as it's created by accomplished chefs using fancy ingredients and hard-to-cook meats. So coveted are these creations, that more and more often you'll find them on dinner menus around the city (think Bao Bei's Shao Bing).

David Hawksworth — whose informal new venture is named after his wife Annabel (how charming!) — has given this city another reason to lunch out with his Spiced Pulled Chicken Sandwich.

ERIN IRELAND

▶ Spiced Pulled Chicken Sandwich ($10.60).

Absurdly tender chicken is draped with finely sliced caramelized onions and a melting slab of buttery provolone. The tasty ingredients lay between thin, toasted house made ciabatta bread.

Despite the item's name, spice didn't hit my palette. No complaints here, however. The creamy and rich texture made up for lack of spice.

Equally satisfying were my impeccable, stylish surroundings. Bel Café is where you want to be.

Bel Café
801 West Georgia St.
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belcafe.com
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Co-worker lunch: Yes
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Blueberry Mascarpone Semifreddo

Preparation:

1. Cut vanilla bean in half; scrape out seeds. In saucepan, heat milk and vanilla seeds over medium heat until steaming.
2. In heatproof bowl, whisk egg yolks and sugar until creamy. Pour milk into egg mix, whisking until thickened. Let cool. In blender, purée 250 ml (1 cup) of the wild blueberries; set aside.
3. Using electric mixer, beat mascarpone until creamy and smooth. Beat in egg mix until combined and lightened. Fold in blueberry puree, remaining blueberries and chocolate. Pour into a small loaf pan lined with plastic wrap and freeze for 4 hours or until firm.
4. Turn loaf onto serving platter and remove plastic wrap. Cut in 2.5-cm (1-inch) slices and garnish with mint, pistachios, blueberries,

THE CANADIAN PRESS/ WILD BLUEBERRY ASSOCIATION

Ingredients:
- 1 vanilla bean
- 125 ml (1/2 cup) milk
- 3 egg yolks
- 75 ml (5 tbsp) granulated sugar
- 625 ml (2 1/2 cups) frozen blueberries
- 250 ml (1 cup) mascarpone
- 30 g (1 oz) bittersweet chocolate, chopped
- 10 ml (2 tsp) chopped shelled pistachios, frozen wild blueberries, mint leaves for garnish

Re-gift it...you know you want to

FUN AND FRUGAL

LESLEY SCORGIE
MONEY@METRONEWS.CA

In the past, re-gifting was socially shunned. But these days it's very common because re-gifting saves money and reduces waste.

Throw that Billy Blanks Tae Bo DVD in a used gift bag and give it to your second aunt who's trying to shave off a few pounds and get fit.

According to couponcabin.com, four out of 10 North Americans have re-gifted presents.

The most commonly re-gifted items are gift cards, duplicate items, and unwanted products.

If you're going to re-gift a present, there are parameters you should follow.

Remove your name from any tags or cards and don't give it back to the same person who gifted it to you.

Refrain from re-gifting personal hygiene products like nail clippers or razors.

Ensure the present is in its original wrapping and don't recirculate something that has been blatantly used.

Try to avoid re-gifting something super sentimental, especially if it's from someone close to you that could find out.

Re-gifting is typically a result of the gift-giver trying to stretch an already limited budget.

If your list of people to buy for keeps growing, coworkers, neighbours, teachers, stop!

Don't bother buying junk for people. This is exactly how and why people go into debt over the holidays which sets them back financially for months.

Instead, write a personalized card or host a volunteer day at the food bank. Why not barter or trade for gifts?

Sell unwanted household items on Kijiji to generate some guilt-free holiday cash.

If you feel truly obliged to buy something, keep it small; less than $10.

Make a small donation on behalf of the person you have to buy for. This is a meaningful and inexpensive way to show your generosity while spreading the holiday spirit.

Or bake treats or make ornaments that everyone can enjoy!

Re-gifting within certain parameters is a resourceful way to keep your budget in check.

"Don't bother buying junk for people. This is exactly how and why people go into debt over the holidays, which sets them back financially for months."

ISTOCK

▶ There are rules involved to giving presents a second life. Namely, don't re-gift something that leads to this sort of face.

FORGOT A BIG BIRTHDAY?

CHARLES THE BUTLER

ASKCHARLES THEBUTLER@ METRONEWS.CA

FOR MORE, VISIT CHARLES MACPHERSON.COM

What is the correct etiquette to acknowledge an important birthday you've forgotten while you are away and travelling?

ISTOCK

▶ If you forgot someone's birthday, the best thing to do is just own up to your mistake.

Interestingly, today I'm in Amsterdam on business and it happens to be my dear friend Wendy's birthday. In a perfect world this problem is really easy to deal with, as you send a card and/or a present ahead of time to the person, perhaps with a warning on the outside of the envelope not to be opened before the birthday date.

Now lets leave the perfect world and go back to reality.

I may be the perfect butler and remind my employer every detail they need to know, however personally I've been more than once travelling and halfway around the world and realized it's Wendy's, Aunt Mary's or my best friend John's birthday today and I forgot. So what to do?

1. First, ideally call the person right away to acknowledge and apologise for your error. Acknowledging your error is more important than anything at that moment in time.

2. If you are unable to call, then send an email again, acknowledging your error and sending your best wishes.

3. Consider bringing something back from where you are in the world. This will hopefully create a special memory.

4. Remember, if you make a promise (to take them out for dinner upon your return) this needs to be a priority as soon as you're home!

I lost a very dear friend once after forgetting her husband's birthday and not making it a priority to follow through with my promise of taking them out for dinner, and I've regretted this foolish error ever since.

5. Lastly, just be honest. We all live very busy lives and being able to acknowledge your error and following through is the right and best thing to do!

HAVE A QUESTION? EMAIL CHARLES AT ASKCHARLESTHEBUTLER@METRONEWS.CA.

THE IMPORTANT THING IS TO TRY

TWO SISTERS

Hi Claire & Andrea,
I just started dating this girl and I'm wondering what I should get her for Christmas, and how much is appropriate to spend on her, given that this is all pretty new. I'm a lawyer and money is not an issue, but I just don't want to scare her away with something too lavish or disappoint her with something too small.
Uncomfortable Santa

ANDREA & CLAIRE
RELATIONSHIPS@METRONEWS.CA

Andrea: Dear Uncomfortable Santa,

In our family, it's not the holiday season unless someone's crying in the bathroom, or dodging a stale bread roll thrown from across the table.

It's the time of year when you can build lifelong memories with family and friends — why make it just about trinkets?

Women appreciate thoughtful gestures as much as pricey ones. How about a little treasure hunt that leads to a romantic dinner for two, followed by a game of throwing snowballs at Christmas carollers?

If you're really into her and vice versa, the memories will overshadow any price tag. Happy holidays!

Claire: Dear U.C.,

I have to admit, that is awkward. Tis the season when everything is supposed to be meaningful, but in your case, not so meaningful that you freak her out. It sounds as though your relationship is still fragile and new — one false move and your love turns to a lump of coal. I think planning interesting things to do together is a great idea. But just in case she buys you something for Christmas, it never hurts to be prepared: you could buy her the movie adaptation of her favourite book or a copy of your favourite book; a CD she might like, or tickets to something you can do together.

Or, even the biggest, most fake batch of mistletoe you can find with a mega stick of lip balm? The choice is up to you. The main thing is that you tried.

TWO SISTERS, 20-SOMETHING ANDREA AND 30-SOMETHING CLAIRE, OFFER THEIR DIFFERING VIEWS ON YOUR RELATIONSHIP ISSUES.

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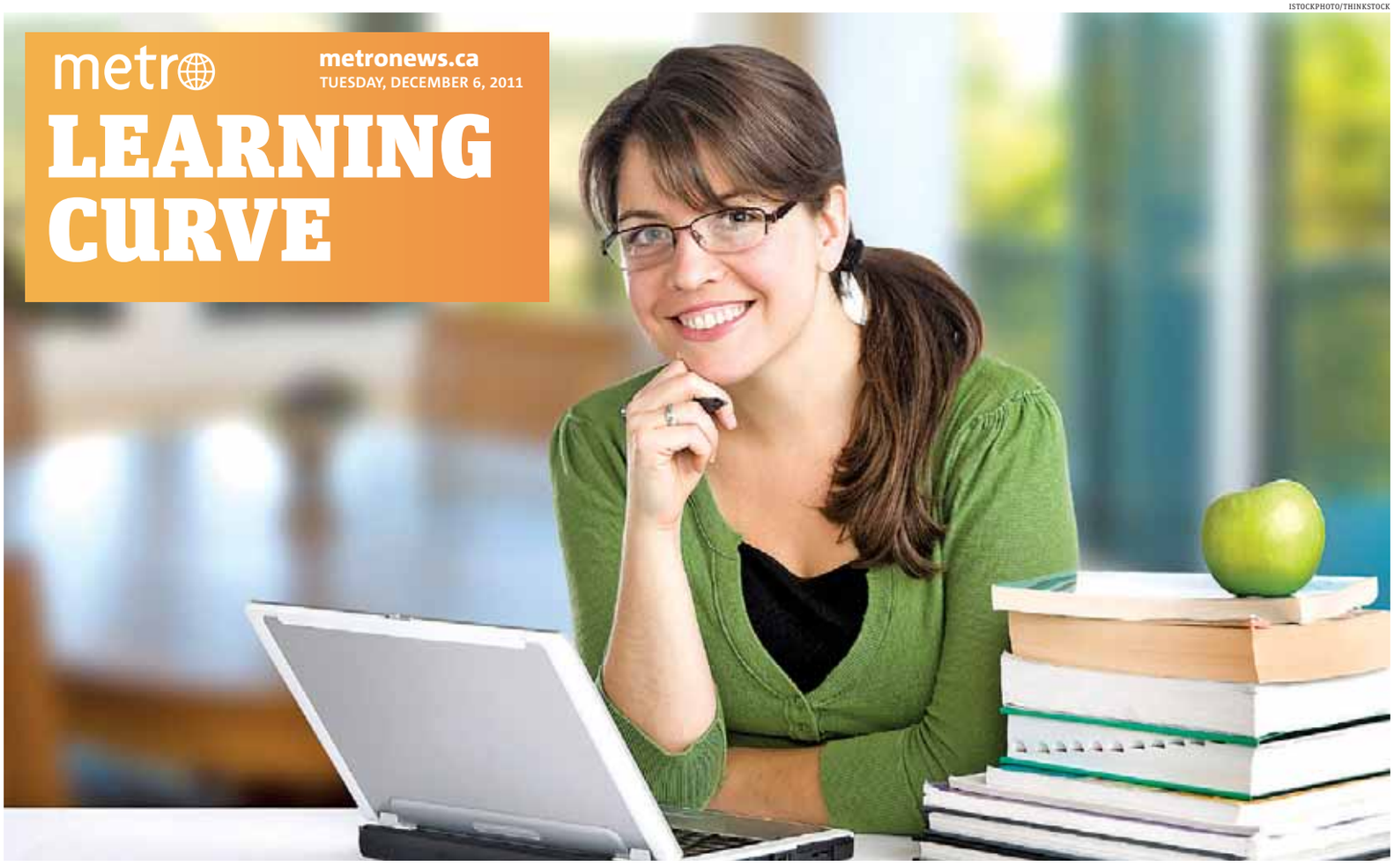
LEARNING CURVE

ISTOCKPHOTO/THINKSTOCK



Schools team together for BPA program

DANIEL HENDRIKSEN
FOR METRO

Starting in May 2012, a new Bachelor of Performing Arts (BPA) degree program will be available in the Lower Mainland. The program, a joint venture between Douglas College, Capilano University, Langara College and Vancouver Community College (VCC), will be the first of its kind in Canada.

The nine-month program is intended for those with a background in dance, music, film arts, stagecraft, theatre, arts and entertainment management, musical theatre or digital media. Students will learn from faculty and industry professionals in a wide variety of performing arts disciplines.

In a press release, Marcus Youssef, project manager for the BPA program and artistic director of Neworld Theatre in Vancouver, said students will receive "real-world" training that is often neglected in performing arts programs.

"Nowhere else in the country have four academic arts institutions partnered to offer a cross-disciplinary performing arts degree that has, at its heart, a commitment to collaboration and self-generation," said Youssef. "These are elements which we believe are crucial to young artists' future success."

Applications are being accepted for the BPA program; the final deadline is Jan. 10. Check out capilanou.ca/bpa for more.

B.C. and China schools form partnerships

Following British Columbia Premier Christy Clark's recent visit to China, more than 20 partnerships or agreements have been signed between B.C. and Chinese post-secondary institutions and organizations.

As a result of the partnerships, as many as 2,500 Chinese students will attend post-secondary schools in B.C. over the next five years.

Twelve B.C. schools, including Capilano University, the British Columbia Institute of Technology, the University of British Columbia, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Douglas College, and Trinity Western University, took part in ceremonies in Guangzhou, Shanghai, Beijing and Chongqing, China, in mid-November to commemorate the agreements.

"International co-operation between B.C. and China means shared experiences, successes and relationships that will continue for a lifetime," Advanced Education Minister Naomi Yamamoto said in a press release.

"International students' contributions help to create services and programming as well as cultural experiences for our domestic students."

More than 39,000 students from approximately 160 countries studied at post-secondary institutions across Canada last year, with more than 12,500 of them coming from China.

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BMO boosts UBC with $2.2 million in donations

DANIEL HENDRIKSEN
FOR METRO

The University of British Columbia's Business Families Centre (BFC) and Dairy Education and Research Centre have recently received a generous boost after BMO Financial Group donated $2.2 million towards education and outreach at both institutions.

The BFC at UBC's Sauder School of Business was the recipient of $1.95 million, and will use the funds to establish a new Family Enterprise Program. A new national database will also be set up by the BFC in order to advance research and provide entrepreneurial families the necessary tools and information to thrive. The database will be the first of its kind in the country.

Meanwhile, UBC's Dairy Education and Research Centre in Agassiz will use the $250,000 it received from BMO to build new classroom space. Numerous international students and researchers practise at the centre, which also plays host to both public and industry conferences. The centre is Canada's largest dairy cattle research facility and houses teams that investigate methods to improve animal health, nutrition and welfare.

Kwantlen student wins ICON Award

Thanks to his hospitality-focused designs and essays, Santiago Arcila, a Kwantlen Polytechnic University Interior Design student, was recently flown to New York City where he received the $5,000 ICON of Industry scholarship from the Hospitality Industry Network (NEWH).

Arcila is the first Canadian to win the scholarship since its inception in 2004, and is also the first male to take home the award.

"I am still in disbelief to have been flown from Vancouver to New York and be the recipient of the NEWH Icon of Industry Scholarship," Arcila said in a press release. "I started my studies in chemical engineering and, yet, here I am six years later receiving a scholarship in the hospitality industry. I couldn't feel more privileged or prouder to receive this award."

The NEWH was founded in 1984 and is an international non-profit organization that links professionals from every facet of the hospitality industry.

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BCIT director wins philanthropy award

DANIEL HENDRIKSEN
FOR METRO

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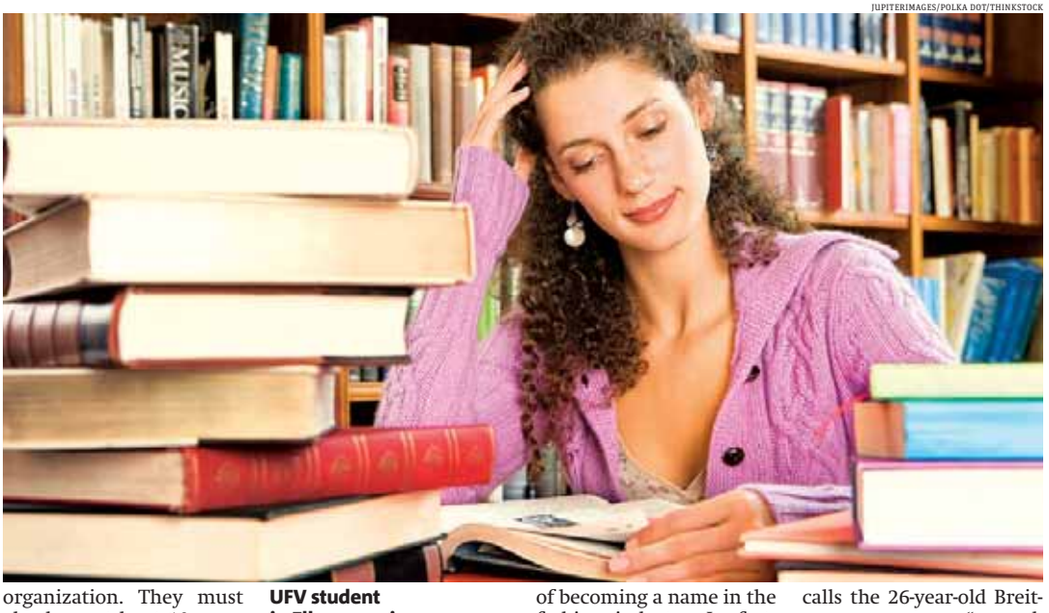

The director of the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) Foundation was the recipient of a prestigious award at the recent 14th annual National Philanthropy Awards luncheon.

Janice Boyle took home the Giving Hearts award for Individual Outstanding Professional Fundraiser at the luncheon, which took place Nov. 22 at the Vancouver Convention Centre. Boyle was nominated for the award by her former colleagues at Covenant House, where she was director of development and communications for more than 13 years before joining BCIT.

The award for Individual Outstanding Professional Fundraiser is given to an individual who practises his/her profession directly for a non-profit organization. They must also have at least 10 years of professional fundraising experience. Boyle was one of six award winners at the annual luncheon.

UFV student in Elle magazine

A Fashion Design student at the University of the Fraser Valley is well on her way to realizing her dream of becoming a name in the fashion industry. In fact, Sabrina Breitenmoser has already been featured in Elle Canada Magazine.

The fashion publication calls the 26-year-old Breitenmoser an "up-and-comer" in its November 2011 edition, and also features a picture of her award-winning design from the last year's TELIO contest.

As well as being featured in Elle Canada, Breitenmoser has recently been offered an internship with one of the TELIO contest judges, Vancouver designer Jason Matlo. The internship is something Breitenmoser says she could not have secured without the help of the design program at UFV.

"The instructors have all been really enthusiastic," Breitenmoser said in a press release. "They're always really excited about any opportunities for us, and are always there to help. And while it was a lot of work and a lot of stress, the program is definitely well worth it in the end."

While her career is still young, Breitenmoser is creating quite the resumé. Before enrolling in UFV's fashion design program, she interned at the well-known Akris design house in Switzerland.

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Take time for some R'n'R

Rest and relaxation is important for students over holidays: Experts

JON TATTRIE
FOR METRO

For students cramming to catch up on the fall semester and wanting to get a jump on the winter semester, the Christmas break can seem like the ideal time to hit the books — but experts say students should use the time to unwind or think long term.

Joanne Mills, a psychologist and the co-ordinator of counselling services at Halifax's Mount Saint Vincent University, says with heavy school loads and long hours working to pay for tuition, students can go years without taking a real rest.

"If at all possible, take the break. They need to charge up their batteries," she says. "For motivation, it's important to miss school. If you don't take that break, you lose your eagerness and passion for learning."

If you can't take a total break, it's better to set down the books and just focus on your job than to study non-stop.

"But having fun and relaxing is probably the best-case scenario," Mills says.

Aleasha McCallion, manager of workplace learning at the University of British Colombia, agrees a break is important, and adds students can use the time to do some career planning. Think about what you would like to do for a summer job or internship, update your resumé and brush up on your interview skills.

When looking at work placements or internships, ensure it will provide learning opportunities and not just be a volunteer role.

The Christmas break is also a good time to do some online gardening. "What does your online profile look like? Your Facebook? Twitter? LinkedIn? If someone Googled you, what would they find?" McCallion asks.

Make sure it all fits your professional image.

Chad Camacho, a fourth-year history student at the University of Toronto, has tried it all on the winter break. He has studied hard, dropped the books and worked to earn money, and taken a proper vacation.

"I find that if I hit the books really hard right away, I tend to lose interest faster once the semester begins. Too much work over the holidays doesn't work for me," he says.

"You only get two weeks break anyway. I usually just take the time off to relax and spend time with my family."

> **"For motivation, it's important to miss school. If you don't take that break, you lose your eagerness and passion for learning."**
> JOANNE MILLS, A PSYCHOLOGIST AND THE CO-ORDINATOR OF COUNSELLING SERVICES AT HALIFAX'S MOUNT SAINT VINCENT UNIVERSITY.

Tips for finding funding

To help ease the financial burden of post-secondary studies, here are some potential sources of funding assistance:

- **Canadian Merit Scholarship Foundation:** The foundation is committed to supporting talented students who show promise of leadership and strong commitment to community service. Visit cmsf.ca for details.
- **Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP):** In preparation for when students are old enough to attend college or university, an RESP offers a flexible savings plan that allows money deposited for post-secondary education to grow tax-free.
- **Student Loans:** These include funding programs from federal and provincial governments and financial institutions. NEWS CANADA

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Early bird gets the job when seeking internships

When Heather MacLean was seeking a 2009 summer internship that was part of her master of publishing program at Simon Fraser University, she took a strategic approach.

First, although the internship would run from May to August, MacLean began considering her options, doing her research and contacting people the previous fall. "I thought, if I want to work in the U.S., is that even possible? What's the paperwork? Can I afford it?"

MacLean wanted a paying internship, since she had completed a non-paying one a few years earlier. By January, she had secured a paying internship with the Department of Canadian Heritage in Ottawa in the Book Publishing Industry Development Program (now the Canadian Book Fund).

MacLean offers the following pointers on snagging an internship:

Pick unpaid or paid. It's important to decide whether you can afford to work for free for two to four months.

Evaluate your long-term goals. MacLean required a solid work project to base her thesis on, which was the point of her internship. The federal government co-op program met those needs.

Do your homework. While many programs help set up placements by offering industry contacts, you have to do a lot of the legwork yourself. JANE DOUCET

National recognition for Douglas College

DANIEL HENDRIKSEN
FOR METRO

Douglas College was a big winner at the Canadian Bureau for International Education's (CBIE) 45th annual conference, which was held Nov. 20-23 in Ottawa.

Douglas took home the national outstanding program award for its Uganda Project, a program that sends student interns to the African nation to work in hospitals, libraries and aid centres. The program, which began in 2006, allows students to work in Uganda for approximately 10 weeks each spring.

The CBIE's outstanding program award is designed to recognize top quality and highly creative programming in international education at post-secondary institutions across Canada.

In a press release, Bob Shebib, co-ordinator of Douglas's Community Social Service Work (CSSW) Department, said the award for the Uganda project recognizes the school's place as a national leader in international education.

To learn more about Douglas's Uganda Project, go to douglas.bc.ca/programs/community-social-service/africa.html.

JIBC paramedic program gets funding

Aspiring paramedics across the province are benefiting from additional student spaces in the Justice Institute of British Columbia's (JIBC) Primary Care Paramedic (CPC) program. The extra space comes thanks to $685,000 in funding from the province of British Columbia.

With this funding, up to 75 students in communities such as Port McNeill, Smithers, Dawson Creek, and Kamloops will be able to complete the CPC program over the next year. The program is already underway in Port McNeill, with a January 2012 start date expected in Smithers and spring 2012 starts in both Dawson Creek and Kamloops.

"Regional delivery of our education programs is an institutional priority," JIBC president Jack McGee said in a press release.

In addition to the part-time training in rural communities, the JIBC also offers the CPC program on a full-time basis at its New Westminster, Victoria, and Kelowna campuses.

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Scholarships can ease financial burden

JANE DOUCET
FOR METRO

If you are a high school student considering attending a university or college after graduation but are worried you won't be able to afford the expense of a three- or four-year undergraduate degree, possibly followed by graduate studies, you are not alone.

"Students are facing more financial barriers than ever before, thanks to high tuition fees, more student debt and less government funding than 30 years ago," says Roxanne Dubois, the chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students.

With annual tuitions averaging $5,000, plus the cost of books and living expenses, it's no wonder that by the time students earn an undergraduate degree, they could be up to their ears in debt.

The good news is there is some relief at hand. "Scholarships, bursaries and grants are sums of money designed to help pay tuition fees that students don't have to pay back," says Dubois.

Students can apply to the Canada Student Grants Program and the Canada Student Loans Program; each province has a similar financial-aid program. Don't forget to check out the post-secondary institution you are either planning to attend or in which you are already enrolled.

The school's website should have information about the annual scholarships, bursaries and grants it offers, or you can call the student financial aid office, students' union office or student services office for information.

If you want to dig deeper, you can make some calls to local public agencies that might offer scholarships to certain special interest groups.

"While scholarships, bursaries and grants don't usually make much of a dent in the overall debt load unless someone is lucky enough to get one that pays full tuition, they do help ease the financial burden somewhat for those who receive them," says Dubois.

Assistance

The Canada Student Loans Program and the Canada Student Grants Program help by providing student financial assistance in the form of repayable loans and non-repayable grants to Canadians attending post-secondary education in most provinces and territories. For information about both programs, visit hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/learning/canada_student_loan/index.shtml.

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Grad designs kiosks at BCIT

DANIEL HENDRIKSEN
FOR METRO

Upon graduation from post-secondary school, many alumni find ways to give back to their former place of education. Whether it is through financial donation or volunteering, it is common place to give back to one's alma mater.

British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) grad Peter Kemp recently used the skills he learned in BCIT's Computer System Technology program to design an integral part of the school's brand new Gateway Building.

Kemp, director of software development for a Burnaby-based company called Qwick Media, helped design three state-of-the-art interactive wayfinding kiosks in the new building. The kiosks are designed to assist users to navigate around campus and to specific buildings, amenities, and services. They also provide information and resources such as student services, class locations, and upcoming events.

This is not the first time Kemp will have assisted students and faculty at BCIT. In the past, he has worked as a customer service representative for BCIT IT Services and was awarded the School of Computing Excellence Award and a Distinguished Alumni Award for Outstanding Student Leadership in 2009.

ISTOCKPHOTO/THINKSTOCK

J.S. Russell to speak at Langara Philosophers Jam

The final Philosophers Jam of the year at Langara College will be taking place Dec. 13. The guest speaker for the event will be J.S. Russell, chair of the Philosophy Department at Langara, and the editor of the Journal of the Philosophy of Sport.

Russell will be posing the question: Is it possible to be a good sport? He will be exploring the issue of competitive sport and whether or not it is morally flawed. The evening will include a short presentation by Russell, followed by an open dialogue session. It will be moderated and light refreshments will be served.

This will be the last of four events put on by Langara's philosophy department this year. The public is welcome and encouraged to attend.

The event will take place from 7-10 p.m. in the faculty and staff dining lounge at Langara's main campus at 100 West 49th Ave. For more, contact Dale Beyerstein at dbeyerstein@langara.bc.ca or 604.323.5359.

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Career Planning and Job Search Courses Tuesday, Dec. 6, noon – room 236 Thursday, Dec. 8 & 15, 4 p.m. – room 236	Downtown Downtown
English as a Second Language Wednesday, Dec. 7, 10 a.m. – room 5025 Wednesday, Dec. 14, 6 p.m. – room 1227	Broadway Broadway
ASL & Deaf Studies Wednesday, Dec. 7, 6 p.m. – room 2555	Broadway
Hair Design Wednesday, Dec. 14, 4:30 p.m. – room 201	Downtown
Esthetics Wednesday, Dec. 14, 4:30 p.m. – room 201	Downtown
Dental Technician Thursday, Dec. 15, 3 p.m. – room 332	Downtown

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Broadway campus is located at 1155 East Broadway, one block west of Clark Drive and across from VCC/Clark SkyTrain station.

Visit **www.vcc.ca** or call **604.443.8453**.

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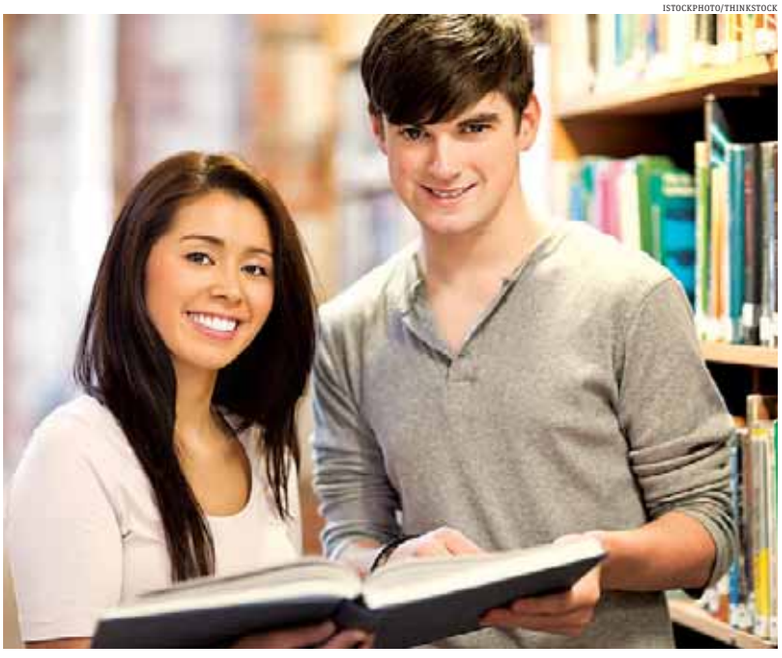

Finding right balance

KELLY PUTTER
FOR METRO

Losing her spot on the honour roll is the price Amy Pielaszek has to pay for working 30 hours per week as a drug store supervisor.

"It's stressful at times," says the 20-year-old Mohawk College student. "It's hard to balance everything. If I work the night before I have a test, I'm kind of screwed."

Results on a recent psychology test tumbled to 60 per cent from an earlier score of 92. She had to work the night before her test. "In high school I was on the honour roll, but this year it's debatable," she said.

Pielaszek isn't alone. A survey of professors and librarians at Ontario universities found that paid work during the school year could be hindering students' studies.

As tuition fees and cost-of-living expenses continue to rise, students are looking for ways to offset escalating costs.

Post-secondary counsellors say there is a maximum number of hours a student should work to successfully manage a full course load. And many work beyond that.

At Calgary's Bow Valley College, that number is 20 hours. Besides offering counselling, time management and budgeting help, the school also has child-care and emergency bursaries that students can access to help balance their expenses.

Ottawa's Carleton University uses the 60-hour rule. If a student is taking 15 hours of classes per week and studying the recommended bare minimum of two hours for every hour of lecture, that totals 45 hours, leaving 15 hours left for paid work.

Students are often reluctant to reveal the number of hours they actually put in for fear they will be advised to quit their jobs, says Carleton's academic adviser Bryan Tinlin. In reality, the fix is in setting priorities.

"If you need to work to pay tuition, you need to reduce your course load," says Tinlin.

"Some are willing to do it and some are not."

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Higgins sidelined by staph

Red-hot Canucks winger out against Avalanche tonight due to infection in his foot

RICH LAM/GETTY IMAGES

▶ Chris Higgins celebrates a goal against the Flames on Sunday.

The Vancouver Canucks will be without the services of red-hot winger Chris Higgins in tonight's game against the Colorado Avalanche.

Canucks coach Alain Vigneault said Higgins suffered a recurrence of a staph infection in his foot that sidelined him for several games last season with the Florida Panthers.

"(Higgins) came in (yesterday) morning. His foot was all swollen up," Vigneault said. "According to what he's telling us, he had the same thing happen to him last year in Florida. Initially there, I think he missed six or seven games. They thought it was ... a bite and then they finally figured out that it was a staph infection."

Vigneault said Higgins was due to visit an infection specialist yesterday. The Canucks have recalled Viktor Oreskovich from Chicago of the AHL to take Higgins' spot in the lineup.

"Hopefully, with their experience in the past, they can get this under control real quick," said Vigneault. "What I saw with his foot (yesterday), I don't think he's going to play (tonight). But, hopefully, (his absence) won't be long."

The 28-year-old Higgins, a native of Smithtown, N.Y., recorded a goal and two assists in Sunday's 5-1 victory over the Calgary Flames to extend his points streak to four games. With 17 points, he is well on his way to surpassing the 23 he produced last season with Florida and the Canucks, who acquired him at the trade deadline to help with their run to the Stanley Cup finals.

Higgins' absence means Vigneault will inevitably revamp his second unit, which includes David Booth and Ryan Kesler. The trio of Higgins and Detroit-area products Booth and Kesler, dubbed the American Express Line because of their U.S. birthplaces, combined for eight points in the one-sided win over a Calgary club that lost for only the second time in six games.

All three had slow starts to the season, Booth first with Florida before a trade, but they have come on strong lately and helped the Canucks (15-10-1) post six wins in their past seven games.

Oreskovich is expected to play a fourth-line role. Higgins' injury gives the 25-year-old Whitby, Ont., native a second chance with the Canucks. He was demoted earlier in the season after the Canucks picked up winger Dale Weise on waivers from the New York Rangers.

Oreskovich, known for his toughness and physical play, has a modest one goal and four assists and just six penalty minutes in 11 games in the AHL.

"He just got back playing," Vigneault said. "He was out with a concussion for some time. They played three games on the weekend. They played three games in three nights, and we heard he played really well. So, for what we need right now, we'll call him up and put him on one of those lines."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

NHL OKs dramatic conference realignment

NHL officials approved a radical realignment plan yesterday that will give the league four conferences instead of six divisions and guarantee home-and-home series among all teams.

The board of governors authorized commissioner Gary Bettman to implement the proposal pending input with the NHLPA. It could be put in place as early as next season.

The league considered two plans to accommodate Atlanta's move to Winnipeg this past summer. The first would have simply moved the Jets to the Central Division and either Detroit or Columbus to the Southeast.

"The simple one wasn't as simple as it looked when you got done with it," Bettman said.

The board opted to go with creating four geographic conferences.

The new format will increase overall travel in the regular season, especially for Eastern teams who will now have more trips West. But it cuts down on travel for some Western Conference teams.

"This is not a subject that everybody is going to get their first choice on."
GARY BETTMAN

"What you try to do is come up with something that everybody can live with, get comfortable with and understands the value of. Because if you ask 30 clubs, you'd probably get 30 different solutions," Bettman said.

The new look has two conferences with seven teams all based in the Eastern time zone: New Jersey, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, New York Islanders, Washington and Carolina in one and Boston, Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa, Buffalo, Florida and Tampa Bay in the other.

The third conference consists of eight teams in the Eastern and Central time zones: Detroit, Columbus, Nashville, St. Louis, Chicago, Minnesota, Dallas and Winnipeg. The fourth conference has eight teams in the Mountain and Pacific time zones: Los Angeles, Anaheim, Phoenix, San Jose, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Colorado.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

4 sports

Canucks preview

Colorado at Vancouver
TV: SNET, 7 p.m.

Vancouver (15-10-1) closes its four-game homestand against the Avalanche (13-13-1), who have won three straight after losing seven of their previous 10.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

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Buono walks away a champion

Lions coach leaves sidelines but will remain B.C. GM ◆ Hopes to name successor before leaving for vacation

Wally Buono always hoped to go out on a high note — and now he has.

The winningest coach in CFL history is stepping away from the sidelines to concentrate on his managerial duties with the Grey Cup champion B.C. Lions. Buono was named vice-president of football operations and will retain his general manager's title.

"I think now is the perfect time," said Buono, 61, in an interview with The Canadian Press after a news conference announcing his decision yesterday at the team's practice facility in Surrey. "When you look at your own usefulness, I think I've been useful in terms of climbing this club to another Grey Cup."

The announcement came just over a week after Buono guided his club to a 34-23 victory over the Winnipeg Blue Bombers in the Grey Cup. The Lions completed a miraculous run after starting the season 0-5.

Buono said the Lions need another voice and another face to guide them into 2012 and beyond. He does not think he can reproduce the same amount of energy the team put forth in the 2011 campaign.

"I don't I think I can get the players or the coaches to buy into it again," he said.

"If there's another face, another voice, that in itself will be more energetic, more exciting — just a better stimulus."
WALLY BUONO

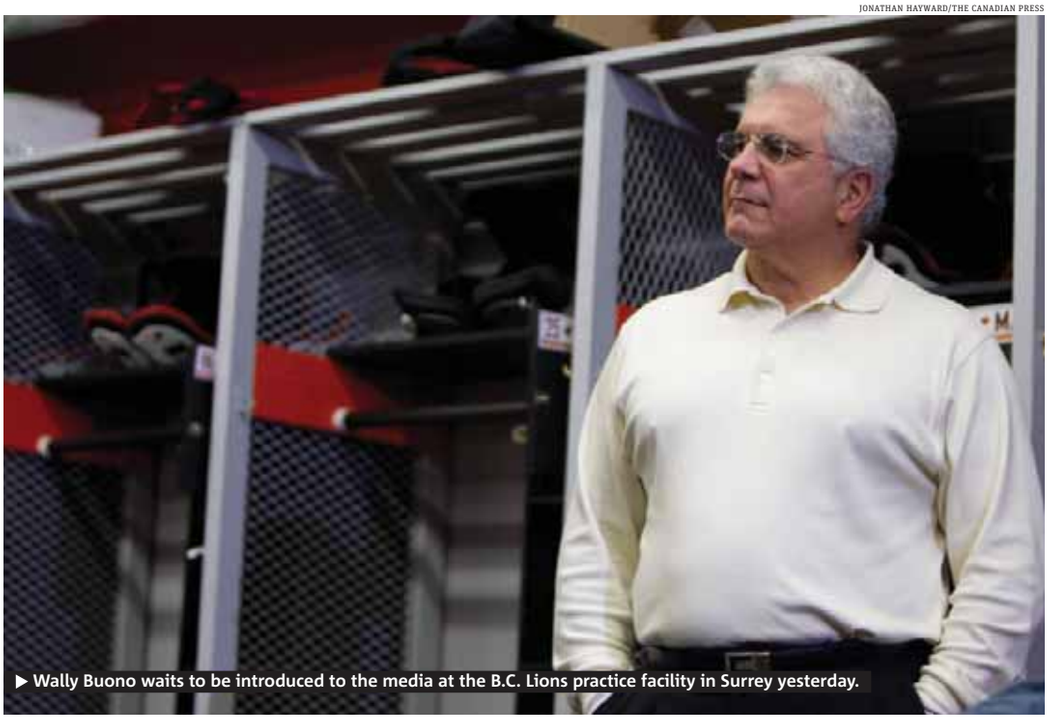
Buono posted a 101-60-1 record with the Lions after joining the team as GM and coach in 2003. He led B.C. to a pair of Grey Cup wins, seven division final appearances and five first-place finishes in the West Division.

"Everybody dreams of exiting on top," said Buono. "Everybody dreams about exiting on their own merits. But David (Braley, the Lions owner) has given me the opportunity to do that since I've been here. He's always allowed me to have the last say. I can't honestly say that all leaderships would have done that."

Buono said he has been contemplating the move for years.

He has a 254-139-3 record over 22 seasons as a coach with the Lions and Calgary Stampeders. Buono has won five Grey Cups in that time — two with B.C. (2006, 2011) and three with Calgary (1992, 1998, 2001).

JONATHAN HAYWARD/THE CANADIAN PRESS



▶ Wally Buono waits to be introduced to the media at the B.C. Lions practice facility in Surrey yesterday.

Lions defensive co-ordinator Mike Benevides, who also coached with Buono in Calgary and joined him in B.C. in 2003, is considered the top candidate to become the next head coach.

"Mike is a candidate," said Buono. "But I don't want to get too far ahead of myself there. The thing I definitely appreciate is where a man's been and how he's gotten there and what he's done with the opportunities he's had. I like Mike. I think he's done a lot."

Former Lions and Stampeders quarterback Dave Dickenson, now Calgary's offensive co-ordinator, has also been cited as a potential candidate. Buono indicated that Dickenson is his second choice at best.

"I have in mind who I'm going to go after first," said Buono. "I don't want to say Dave doesn't have enough experience, because that's not true. There are other teams that are going to be looking at him. From my perspective, I believe at this point that I have another person that I'd like to look at first." **THE CANADIAN PRESS**

Identifying NFL juggernauts and jokers

As the regular season begins to wind down, the NFL has its share of thoroughbreds. And its share of pretenders.

With four weeks remaining, the Packers, 49ers and Saints have separated themselves in the NFC, and perhaps in the entire league. Green Bay and San Francisco already have secured division titles, and New Orleans is almost there.

The elite of the AFC, while not quite so accomplished, are the Ravens, Steelers, Patriots and Texans.

In the middle is a muddle: all kinds of teams with all kinds of strengths — and weaknesses.

Nine teams sit at 7-5, and one (Giants) at 6-6. All are in the mix to either win their division or grab a wild-card spot.

Most, if not all of them, are not legitimate championship contenders, no matter how bravely they might talk.

Other teams really have a shot at making the post-season and doing some damage there.

The Packers seem headed for an undefeated regular season — if they decide to chase it.

Two years ago, it was New Orleans leading the charmed life. Drew Brees has an even deeper, more dangerous receiving corps and backfield than in 2009, and while the Saints also have issues on defence, they can outscore them.

Having clinched their first playoff berth since 2002, the 49ers have the kind of rugged, versatile defence that gives any team a chance.

Four AFC teams are 9-3 and, barring collapses, are headed to the post-season. New England, Baltimore and Pittsburgh are the perennials, Houston the newcomer.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The pretenders

These teams may look respectable based on their spots in the standings, but they have little chance to do damage once the playoff pressure ratchets up.

Cowboys
Dallas can be dangerous in the NFC East, and also can be a flop.

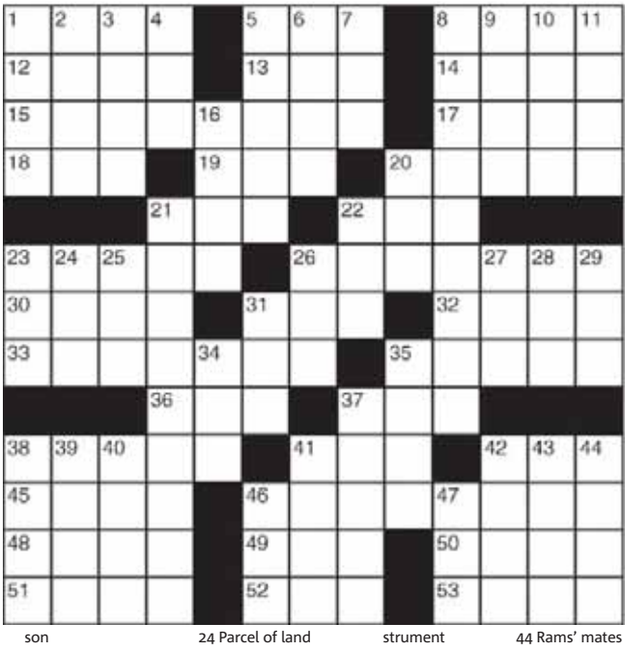
Bengals
Cincinnati can't beat any of the good teams left on its schedule.

Bears
Chicago is down to a backup quarterback, and Matt Forte is hurt.

Broncos
It's difficult to see the Broncos riding deep into the playoffs.

Raiders
Oakland has huge issues on defence and with penalties.

Crossword



Across

1 Weak, as an excuse
5 Thickness
8 Amble
12 Wicked
13 Tall tale
14 Press
15 "The Glass Menagerie" playwright
17 Building block name
18 Old insecticide
19 Conk out
20 Explosion
21 Moist
22 Luau bowlful
23 Lisa Marie's dad
26 Former
30 Work hard
31 Small barrel
32 Stare
33 Pursued obsessively
35 Knee counterpart
36 Salary
37 Dinner for Dobbin
38 "Hammerin' Hank"
41 Neither mate
42 That woman
45 Huff and puff
46 Sudden violent wind
48 Facility
49 High card
50 Flame
51 Rip
52 Firmament
53 Rock band's accessories

Down

1 Lascivious
2 Eager, plus
3 Vibraphonist Jackson
4 Right angle
5 Braid
6 Citrus fruit
7 "Certainly"
8 As a volunteer would
9 Vicinity
10 Yule fuel
11 Entanglement
16 Mid-month date
20 Greet the villain
21 Energetic determination
22 Boxer
23 Type squares
24 Parcel of land
25 By way of
26 Proof letters
27 Apply lightly
28 Kind of dye
29 Kitten's remark
31 Crucial
34 Neb. neighbor
35 British noble
37 Like Swiss cheese
38 Help a hood
39 Wings
40 Parks or Bonheur
41 Shaving mishap
42 Take to the pool
43 Angel's instrument
44 Rams' mates
46 Existed
47 "— picture paints a thousand words ..."

▶ Yesterday's answer

For today's crossword answers and for expanded horoscopes, go to metronews.ca

Sudoku

		2					4	8
	7	8		5	2			
1			9					
3		7	6		9			
	5						3	
			1		5	6		7
					4			3
			7	9		2	1	
6	8					5		

How to play

Fill in the grid, so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1-9. There is no math involved. You solve the puzzle with reasoning and logic.

Yesterday's answer ▶

2	3	1	5	4	9	6	8	7
4	5	7	8	3	6	2	9	1
6	8	9	1	2	7	3	5	4
9	6	4	7	8	2	5	1	3
8	1	3	9	6	5	4	7	2
5	7	2	4	1	3	9	6	8
3	9	8	6	7	4	1	2	5
1	2	6	3	5	8	7	4	9
7	4	5	2	9	1	8	3	6

Send a KISS

You can now post your kiss, and read even more kisses, at metronews.ca/kiss.

Gerard
Round-faced boy from Gerard, we have a perfectly matching eating schedule. Every time I go to eat, there you are. Not that I'm creepy or anything. Anyway, it sure is cool when we make eye contact, isn't it? You're really cute and have nice hair, and you should know you can always sit by me. :)
FROM BABY J

Thoughts of you You wanna be with? Come with? Here with? Me! Me! Me! Like your loyalty equally! Wink!Wink! Sha-wink! Tickle, giggle, wiggle, squiggly! ;)
FROM LINGERING MEMORIES

CKG
You truly are one of the most beautiful people I've met. Not just on the outside, but in your heart! This Tuesday is our last class together, but I know that it is not the end =)
FROM CCB

Today
4°/0°
Rain and snow
40%
Wednesday
4°/-1°
Showers
40%
Know what the weather will be 14 days from now.
Check the 14 day trend.
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Today's horoscope

♈ Aries March 21-April 20 Make sure you act logically and have a rational reason for everything you do.

♉ Taurus April 21-May 21 By all means go off by yourself today and let the rest of the world take care of itself.

♊ Gemini May 22-June 21 You will see and understand things today that others have overlooked.

♋ Cancer June 22-July 22 You will see or hear something to your advantage today.

♌ Leo July 23-Aug.23 You will be in a questioning frame of mind today.

♍ Virgo Aug. 24- Sept. 22 Don't give up on something just because it is boring or does not seem to be working out the way you had hoped.

♎ Libra Sept. 23-Oct. 23 If you stick your nose in someone else's business today you will regret it.

♏ Scorpio Oct. 24-Nov. 22 Find ways to persuade those you live and work with to shoulder more of the everyday burden.

♐ Sagittarius Nov. 23-Dec. 21 You set such high standards that there are bound to be times when you cannot live up to them.

♑ Capricorn Dec. 22-Jan. 20 Information that comes your way over the next 24 hours will cause you to doubt what you were previously told by friends or work colleagues.

♒ Aquarius Jan. 21-Feb. 18 You need to get your message across and the best way to do that is to be forceful without being aggressive.

♓ Pisces Feb. 19-March 20. Financially and professionally you'll go far today, but don't go too far and promise things you may not be able to deliver. **SALLY BROMPTON**

FABRIZIO GIOVANNOZZI/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Caption contest

MARK BAKER/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Silver Bullion	$29.94/ounce

Silver

Unrecognized Silver bars 1 ounce or more	$0.79/gram
Stamped Sterling Silver	$0.59/gram
Stamped .800 Silver	$0.51/gram
Unstamped Solid Silver	$0.42/gram

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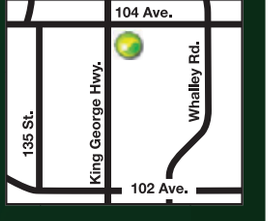

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